**THE EMANCIPATION OF THE PEASANTRY**

The revolutionary breakdown of 1917 had, of course, deep roots. Discontent had been accumulating for centuries. The peasantry, comprising about 85 per cent of the population, had been in the grip of a regime of harsh oppression, in almost total bondage. The regime of serfdom had been growing more and more severe at a time when the conditions of the peasants in other countries were gradually improving. Since the essence of serfdom lay in the unrestricted power of a small class of noble landowners over a vast number of indentured peasants, the cause of Russia's celebrated backwardness may be found in this alone.

Thus, the final emancipation of the peasants—in 1861, at about the same time as that of the American Negroes—was perhaps the most important single event in Russian history before the 1917 Revolution itself. The emancipation of the serfs was not due to any humanitarianism on the part of Tsar Alexander II. It was to a large extent the result of the perception that Russia's backwardness in comparison to other European powers, notably England and France, and especially the humiliating defeat it had suffered on its own territory in the Crimean War of 1854-1856, was largely due to this paralyzing institution of serfdom. At the same time, the immense progress of capitalism in Europe and America, in which the availability of free labor was a prime factor, made a powerful impression on even the hidebound elements of the Russian nobility. The position was in fact tidily summed up by Tsar Alexander II when he told an audience of noblemen that it was better to abolish serfdom from above than to allow it to be abolished from below.

But the great defect of the emancipation of 1861 was that it left the peasants dissatisfied. Though their juridical status had been changed, they were still deprived of the land they worked. They had been docilely waiting and hoping for something to be done about serfdom and the property rights it implied; while the government commissions were working out the terms of the emancipation, they had been lying low. The moment the terms became known, a wave of peasant riots broke out—as many as 647 during the first four months after the publication of the royal decree. Under the new law, the peasants generally received as their own only the land they had been entitled to cultivate under serfdom. Since, generally speaking, they had been obliged to work three days on their own land and three days on their master's, the land they were allotted by the emancipation decree was not enough to support them, especially since the allotment was accompanied by a complicated scheme of "redemption payments" that the peasants were responsible for over many decades.

It was not so much the actual scarcity of land that impoverished the peasants as the primitive agricultural methods. The prospect was extremely remote that any emancipated peasant bound by redemption dues would be able to accumulate enough capital to improve his farming.

**★ THE VILLAGE COMMUNE**

In addition, the peasant was not his own man; though emancipated from the landowner, the peasant remained bound to the village "commune" that was the basic form of peasant organization. The land belonged to the peasants, but it belonged to them collectively; the commune could dictate what crops were to be planted and periodically redistribute the land it cultivated. This was a powerful factor in peasant life; it helped prevent the formation of a stratum of individual peasant farmers. The government was reluctant to change this system, partly because it was easier to collect taxes from the responsible collective organization and partly because it was believed that the peasant commune would be a bulwark against the spread of subversive ideas.

This attitude prevailed until the revolution of 1905, which V. I. Lenin called a "dress rehearsal" for 1917. It was only after the immense jolt this revolution gave the governing classes that a serious attempt was made to create a class of peasant farmers as the most reliable prop of the social order against the propaganda of left-wing groups. This attempt took the form of two decrees (1907 and 1910) that broke up the peasant commune as a binding institution; they gave every member of a commune the right to demand his allotment of land in one unit and enabled every commune to dissolve itself into a number of individual holders by simple majority vote. It is true that, in 1917, the great bulk of the peasantry was still being governed by the commune, but the agrarian reform aimed at wiping it out had been steadily spreading. Lenin took the view that the most substantial single obstacle to Bolshevik progress among the peasants was this penetrating agrarian reform of property relations. It seems likely that, had the movement continued, it would have resulted in the creation of a large class of farmers, but war and the Revolution interrupted it. When Russia plunged into World War I, a great majority of the peasants were still clamoring for land.

It was not the mere desire for land that constituted such a powerful political stimulus; it was the peasants' belief that they had a right to this land because they worked it, that it was, in short, somehow theirs in principle to begin with.

**★ THE EMERGENCE OF A WORKING CLASS**

Another immensely important and, as it turned out, decisive factor in Russian society before the Revolution was the development of an extremely lively working class. Capitalism on the West European model came to Russia late; for that very reason, it made exceptionally rapid progress against the old-fashioned background. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Russia consisted almost entirely of peasant serfs, more or less at the disposition of a relatively tiny nobility, with a thin intermediate layer of government functionaries, merchants, and the small populations of the scattered cities. By the end of the century, enormous businesses had been established in the metallurgical and mining industries, and in textiles especially. The vastness of the country had been partly neutralized by a railway network, serfdom had vanished, and there was a vigorous middle class and industrial working class. The number of workers had expanded, for instance, from some 95,000 in 1801 to 1,742,000 by 1896. Be

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| tween 1861 and 1870, the city population increased by about 45 per cent, from less than four and one-half million to more than six million.  A large part of this was accomplished by the exceptionally heavy flow into Russia of foreign capital, without which the expansion of Russian capitalism would have been unthinkable. In 1914, about one-third of all the capital invested in Russian stock companies was foreign. French capital was exceptionally well represented; on the eve of World War I, about 60 per cent of the pig iron and 50 per cent of the coal produced in Russia came from enterprises operated by French capital. Great Britain, Germany, and Belgium were also heavily represented. This heavy participation of foreign capital in Russian economic life reflects the weakness of the Russian capitalist class as an independent factor and partly explains the great interest taken after the Revolution by Great Britain and France in the destruction of the Bolshevik regime, which wiped out all foreign holdings in Russia.  The most important single development in Russia before World War I may be said to have been the great industrial boom. Just because it took place within the framework of general Russian backwardness, it had an exceptionally heavy impact. [\*](http://www.questiaschool.com/reader/action/next/99876621#*)The growth of industry was surprisingly dynamic. Between 1905 and World War I, for instance, the total industrial production in Russia increased by about 100 per cent. But more important than mere arithmetic was the up-to-date character of the booming industry, which, because of the very tardiness of Russia's appearance in the capitalist world, was able to dispense with the obsolescent features that were so large a part of foreign capitalism.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_   |  |  | | --- | --- | | \* | This backwardness may be illustrated most simply by pointing out that, at the peak of tsarist prosperity before the war, the national income per capita was eight to ten times less than in the United States. This does no more than reflect the fact that, in 1913, the total number of people engaged in all nonagricultural pursuits—industry, commerce, transport, etc.—did not amount to more than one-seventeenth of the population, whereas in the United States, for every person engaged in agriculture about two and one‐ half were engaged in industry. | |
| The contrast between the relative positions of industry and agriculture was striking. Peasant life, the foundation of the country's economy, had risen only a little above the level of the seventeenth century, but Russian industry was, in technique and structure, by no means negligible even as compared to world capitalism. Even more important than absolute industrial growth was the density of the production process, which, during the twenty-five years before World War I, had become noteworthy. [\*](http://www.questiaschool.com/reader/action/next/99876622#*)  But what proved most decisive in this economic process was one of its political consequences. The concentration of workers in huge enterprises meant something very simple: talking to one another every day, engaging in the same day-to-day struggle for a living, they became unified. The mere accumulation of thousands of workers on the same premises year after year, by consolidating them and giving them esprit de corps, turned them, independent of "ideology" or political ideas, into a first-class political entity.  ★ THE CONSEQUENCES OF WORLD WAR I  It was this combination of generalized peasant discontent and the intensification of working-class growth that was to provide the background for the crumbling of the tsarist regime. But the deciding factor was the war itself.  From the moment hostilities broke out, it was obvious that the Russian forces were totally inferior to the Germans in everything but numbers. Russia was as badly prepared for World War I as it  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_   |  |  | | --- | --- | | \* | In 1914, for instance, 35 per cent of all American workers were employed in small enterprises, with fewer than a hundred workers apiece; in Russia, there were fewer than 18 per cent in this position. Both the United States and Russia had about the same ratio of businesses employing one hundred to one thousand workers, but in the United States fewer than 18 per cent of the workers were employed in giant enterprises, whereas in Russia 32 per cent of all workers were employed in giant enterprises in 1901, and over 40 per cent in 1914. In the main industrial areas, these figures are still more striking; in Petersburg, now Leningrad, over 44 per cent were employed in giant enterprises, and in Moscow, more than 57 per cent. Russian textile and metal industries were in fact dominated by gigantic plants. | |

had been for every war in its history; its losses were stupendous, far greater than those of any other belligerent. They were estimated at six to eight million dead, wounded, and prisoners. The destructive effect of the war on the morale of even the commanding staff is illustrated by a statement General Polivanov, the War Minister, made after a German campaign in 1915 that broke the back of the Russian army. In a celebrated phrase, he said that Russia's sole hope lay in the "immeasurable distances, impassable roads, and the mercy of St. Nicholas, patron of Holy Russia."

To some extent, the difficulties in the conduct of the war can be explained by the bureaucratic inefficiency of the War Department and the generals; the broader explanation is the backwardness of Russian industry as such, enhanced by the large-scale blockade of the country.

The government tried to make up for its radical shortcomings in supply by mobilizing its enormous population. Some fifteen-and-a-half million men were put under arms in the course of the war; this draft brought about a decisive change in the composition of the army. The former officers' corps, generally upper‐ class, was to a large extent replaced by plebeian recruits. When the floods of novices, overwhelmingly peasant, were flung into the mangling machine of a large-scale industrial war, often in the charge of incompetent officers, their political reliability was substantially undermined. The government could depend on the peacetime army; but the wartime army, swollen by these raw recruits from the villages, identified itself more with the civilian masses of the country—that is, the peasants and workers—than with the official authorities.

But these factors comprise only the *immediate* material and social background of the upheaval of 1917. There was a great deal more involved in the toppling of the Romanovs than mere material and social conditions. What ultimately changed Russian life beyond recognition was the clash of ideas unleashed by the social collapse. It was easy to see the evidence for the growing discontent with the official regime of both the peasantry and the working class, but that discontent was expressed and channeled by ideas and theories. It is impossible to follow the development of the revolution between February and October without glancing at those ideas and their architect—the Russian "intelligentsia," of which the Bolshevik party was a characteristic offshoot.

The Russian intelligentsia, surely one of the most curious social formations in history, over a number of generations contrived the web of ideas that was lying in wait to ensnare the turbulent events of 1917. In contrast to the tradition-bound peasantry and officialdom, it was the sole agency for the cultivation and dissemination of ideas.

The Russian intelligentsia, which arose around the middle of the nineteenth century, was distinguished by its world outlook, which was essentially that life and ideas are really *important* and that the world can and should be shaped in the framework of some ideal.

**★ THE GROWTH OF NEW IDEAS**

After 1857, it became possible for some plebeians to acquire a university education; when they began invading the universities, even though in small numbers, the mystical element inherent in the thinking of the masses of the Russian people took on a secular form, but it expressed the same age-old longing of the people for redemption. The messianic yearnings expressed in the acquisition of knowledge and the determination to change the world resulted in the formation of what may be called the combat arm of the intelligentsia—the Russian revolutionary movement—which destroyed tsarism and poured its inflammatory spirit abroad upon the world.

As the plebeians came to acquire an education, the general dissatisfaction with the rigidity of Russian life began to find expression in a quest for systems of ideas. The French Age of Enlightenment had set its stamp primarily on the aristocracy up to the middle of the nineteenth century, but around the time the plebeians began to come into the universities, German ideas infiltrated Russia and swiftly replaced the rational and empirical ideas of the French. Young Russian Hamlets, floating about in a social no-man's land, with neither family, wealth, nor position, passionately longed to *believe* as well as to *know*. In Germany, they found fertile soil for their desire to change the world.

German thought was both a rejection of French rationalism and a way of bypassing the realities of the Russian police state. At first, German philosophy dominated the intellectual universe of the newly evolving class of Russian intellectuals, but then it in turn was felt to be too remote. Social studies came into their own as the nineteenth century progressed; a historical frame of reference came to be relied on for theory, in contrast to mere timeless speculation. France was turned to again, this time not as the mother of abstract rationalism, but in the form of French socialism. French socialist thought was applied to the study of Russia itself. There was a return to the realities of the police state, with the determination to change them in accordance with the growing movement of messianism.

During the 1840's, the ferment of opinion in Russia gave rise to two broad attitudes, conventionally described as Slavophilism and Westernism. Basically, the Westerners believed in Western European modernism; they considered European culture universal and wanted to plunge Russia into it. They felt that Russia could achieve worldwide significance after outgrowing its provincial limitations. "European culture" could, of course, mean almost anything, and the Westerners helped themselves to everything in   
it that pleased them. The Westerners were entirely heterogeneous in origin; with varying degrees of emphasis, they believed in science, constitutional government, liberal values, and so forth. They were generally against serfdom, at least theoretically, but were usually tactful about it; they deplored, somewhat ineffectively, the chasm between the Russian masses and the educated elite. Not all were socialists; some were actively opposed to socialism.

The Slavophiles represented a native Russian resistance to the growing influence of European ideas. They were strong believers in the uniqueness of the Russian national past. They thought the West decadent, in the grip of materialistic rationalism. They were also strongly committed to the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church as the axis of the Russian people and its chief hope. The Slavophiles were rooted in the landed aristocracy and were not necessarily in favor of official Russian policy. But, even though Slavophilism was capable of a critical attitude toward the tsarist state, it gradually dwindled to an attitude of identification with the official regime, becoming, in fact, merely one more of its ideological arms.

What was in many ways a fusion between Westernist and Slavophile thought was effected by the father of populism, Alexander Herzen (1812-1870), author of the celebrated slogan "Go to the People!" Essentially, populism revolved around an adoration of the Russian "people"—that is, the peasantry—and it depended for its effectiveness on a mystical belief in the virtues of the Russian peasants and on its corollary, that it could redeem all Russia by means of agrarian socialism based on the village commune. Slavophiles adored the village commune as representing the quintessence of Russianism; the populists emphasized its economic and organizational aspect, disregarding the entire ethical and religious preoccupation of the Slavophiles.

It was the Westernizing branch of the Russian intelligentsia that gave birth to the revolutionary movement destined to smash tsarism and create a new society on its ruins. For the chief characteristic of the intelligentsia was, after all, its awareness, and, since its awareness was largely directed at the world it lived in, it   
was only natural for it to become dissatisfied. Even a society less oppressive, less police-ridden, and less harsh than the tsarist would doubtless have evoked criticism. Tsarism, with its many and varied shortcomings, defects, and cruelties, was bound to come under fire. In fact, almost as soon as the intelligentsia became conscious of itself as a special group, preoccupied by the contrast between Europe and Russia, a desire to do something about it began growing. This desire was ultimately bound to become organized.

**★ ORGANIZED DISCONTENT**

There had been many sporadic attempts to do something about the state of Russia, even among dissident aristocrats, but it was doubtless the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 that finally launched a movement of radical upheaval. The emancipation of the serfs and the concomitant development of Russian capitalism set Russia squarely on the rails of at least the beginnings of a modern economy. By breaking up old-fashioned social ties, it ensured a gain in momentum in the new direction. Significantly, the whole of the generation that accomplished the revolutions of 1917 was born between 1870 and 1880.

Broadly speaking, the revolutionary movement of organized discontent was made up of two currents: populism and Marxism.

The populists naturally believed in the slogan "Go to the Peoplel" The notion that inspired them was that the peasants were by nature hostile to official Russia and could therefore be organized against it. But this faith in the "people" did not mean that the "people" shared this view of themselves. The real difficulty with the peasants, at first, proved to be that, however many their grievances against the official regime, these were not politically generalized. The peasants were longing for land, but that did not mean that they were against the tsar as such or the institution of monarchy as such. They retained both a pious attachment to the person or the idea of the tsar and a determination to get hold of the land somehow. This attitude might, of course, change, and it did. But, in the last third of the nineteenth century, there was still no sign of such a change.

The populist movement developed, in fact, a terrorist wing that was far more notorious, and in its own way effective, than anything else in the movement. This was because the people failed to respond to the enthusiasm of the youthful populists whose idealism was expressed by the idea of inflaming the oppressed Russian masses with their own vision of a new society.

The expression "Go to the People!" retained its power over the idealistic generation that believed in it to a large extent because of its vagueness. It was merely the lowest common denominator of the many kinds of men who typified Russian dissidence. It actually represented two distinct states of mind, both emotional. One was the idealistic, mystical adoration of the People as somehow divine; the desire was to sacrifice oneself, to serve. The other emotion was one of rage; it arose because the deified People seemed reluctant to respond to the love being offered them on such an idealized platter. It was probably the incapacity of the people, at this time at least, for collective action that forced the frustrated intellectuals to express themselves through violence.

Thus there were always two intellectual types in the populist movement: the folk-worshipers and the idealistic assassins. The assassins were folk-worshipers in their own way, but they were too impatient to wait for the people to wake up and create a spontaneous mass movement that could storm the fortress of tsarism.

The enthusiasm generated among the idealistic youth of Russia by the various forms of populism is indescribable. By the "crazy" summer of 1874, for instance, the movement "To the People" was already assuming a semiorganizational character. Literally thousands of young men and women, exalted by fantastically optimistic reports that the Russian countryside was about to burst into flames, dressed themselves as peasants and invaded the rural provinces. Some tried to set up fixed centers for agitation; others roved about preaching. The peasants listened to them with apathy or bewilderment. The police were the only ones who paid them any attention; they were arrested in droves.

The terrorism that supplemented or replaced the populists' folk-worshiping idealism naturally took the form of an attempt on the tsar's life. One of the principal currents of populism was ultimately successful in this, assassinating the same tsar, Alexander II, who had emancipated the serfs. Although this populist organization retained the same humane vocabulary—revolving around socialism, faith in the people, the overthrow of the autocracy, and democratic representation—its sole objective was, in fact, the murder of the tsar. The preparations for this demanded boundless zeal, painstaking diligence, and great personal daring. In fact, the idealism of these young assassins was perhaps the most impressive thing about the whole populist movement. Though a few populist leaders were of peasant origin, most were drawn from the intelligentsia of the upper and middle classes. The motives of the latter were quite impersonal; one of the things that baffled the police in stamping out the movement—in which they never succeeded—was just this combination of zeal and selflessness.

The actual membership of the populist societies was relatively small. But their ideas attracted wide support, even in the topmost circles of the bureaucracy and, for that matter, in the security police as well. The upper-class origins of many of the revolutionaries meant a source of funds; many idealists donated their entire fortunes to the movement. It must be remembered that the Russian upper classes or many of their individual members were in a peculiarly contradictory situation; they had been brought up, after all, on the humanitarian ideals common to European civilization, yet they were living in conditions that were more blatantly at variance with European ideals than those of any other country. They had to make a choice: either give lip service to the conventional ideals or take to the high road of action to force society to conform with its own ideals. Even the Bolsheviks were later to benefit by this singular situation; many capitalists assuaged their consciences by contributing funds for their activities.

The assassination of the tsar in 1881 marked the high point of the terrorist wing of the populist movement. After that, it subsided abruptly. By the end of the century, it had totally declined.

The populist branch of the general Russian revolutionary movement seems to have undergone a crisis, perhaps primarily because of the futility of its basic assumptions—the political efficacy of terror and the idea that the peasants could conduct a revolution by themselves. But its basic attitudes were inherited by a party we shall encounter in the 1917 revolutions—the Social Revolutionary party—a party that was to remain a factor in Russian life until after the Bolsheviks took power in October 1917.

**★ RUSSIAN MARXISM**

It was, of course, Marxism that was finally to dominate the scene in Russia. It did so after an initial delay—the Russian translation of Marx's *Capital* was the first to be published, in 1869, only two years after the original had appeared—but, toward the end of the nineteenth century, after having made considerable progress in the rest of Europe, it began overshadowing the populist movement.

Marxism, apart from the idealism it shared with populism, was rooted in an organic social development, the emergence of an industrial working class—the proletariat—that was ultimately responsible for its successful development.

Perhaps the chief appeal that Marxism held for the Russian intelligentsia, even more so than for the intellectuals of other countries, was its combination of a powerful messianic yearning with an appearance of scientific methodology. It offered youthful enthusiasts the best of both worlds. Their ardent desire to change the world was fortified by sound, or seemingly sound, scientific reasons as to why this was not only possible, but was, even more seductively, inevitable.

As far as Russia was concerned, Marxism may be summed up as the contention that Russian history is a part of world history and that, because of this, Russia must pass through capitalism in order to reach the future socialist society. It was not the peasantry, Marxists thought, that would be able to lead the march to socialism, but the industrial working class. Terrorism had to be abandoned as a tactic that was both futile and, in view

of the objectively developing social forces, superfluous. The main task of the revolutionary leaders was to be the creation of a disciplined working-class party to conduct Russia into the promised land.

The contrast with populism was, of course, clear, but, since for a long time neither movement had a mass base, the energies of a small number of dedicated intellectuals were expended in arguing with one another. Every word said by Marx and his collaborator Engels was carefully scrutinized, analyzed, and commented on, so that everything they said could be funneled into the Russian context. By 1887, *Capital* had become the most popular book among Russian students.

But, though the hopes of these "Marxified" idealists rested on the nascent Russian working class, which was to provide the motor of the Russian revolution, they had no actual connections with the workers. A wave of great strikes, for instance, broke out in the early 1880's and 1890's, but they owed nothing to "ideology": they were simply due to the economic grievances that were the growing pains of Russian capitalism. They were not "guided" by Marxists at all, and, since they had no motivating ideal, their repression by the police and troops was a simple matter.

For, in the beginning, Russian Marxism was as much of a detached, abstract, intellectual activity as any other product of the intelligentsia; it was no more than a literary discussion society. At first, curiously enough, the faith Marxism professed in the development of the "objective" forces of society protected it from the tsarist censors. In the early 1880's, the idea developed that the Marxists were actually friendly to capitalism, since they were convinced that Russia *had* to develop a "bourgeois" society. To many Marxists, the capitalist system was bound to succeed feudalism, just as it was bound to precede socialism. Consequently, some orthodox Marxists, thinking they had to help along a process that was inevitable anyhow, favored capitalism to such an extent that, in a particularly calamitous famine (1891-1892), they were even against helping the peasants for fear of impeding the growth of capitalism!

Because of this peculiarity of Marxist thought, it was possible for many Marxists to be quite legal from the point of view of the authorities. Many people identified Marxism with the Manchester school of British economics; since, in addition, Marxism was against terrorism in principle, the tsarist government tolerated this "legal Marxism" for a long time. Thus until the outbreak of World War I, there was, in addition to illegal Marxism, a legal branch adhered to by many of the new class of business managers and engineers the growing industrialization of Russia was giving birth to.

Until the middle of the 1890's, Marxism was no more than a way of arguing against populism; factories and workshops were far in the future. About 1893, the term "social-democratic," already current in Germany, began to be used for Russian Marxism to distinguish it, in terms of its theory of social development, from terrorist or anarchist opinion.

The first Marxist organization in Russia, the Emancipation of Labor group, was founded in 1883 by, among others, G. V. Plekhanov, the "father of Russian Marxism." Numerous discussion societies, "clubs," and "circles" sprang into being, and by 1895 the movement had progressed sufficiently to attempt unification seriously. It was in this year that some twenty Marxist discussion and literary coteries in the St. Petersburg ( now Leningrad) area, under the leadership of V. I. Lenin (born Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov) and Martov (born Julius Tsederbaum), fused in the Fighting Union for the Liberation of the Working Class. Intellectual discussion was combined with practical activity when the union unambiguously shifted its emphasis to energetic agitation among the rank and file of the proletariat. Other centers followed suit. By the end of the century, the Marxist movement, though still negligible in numbers, was a substantial factor in Russian life.

**★ FACTIONAL STRIFE**

In spite of the "scientific" methodology Russian Marxism shared with Marxism in general, it was always splintered, perhaps because the message of the scriptures was too elusive to be divined with precision. The great arc of opinion within the confines of gen

eral Marxism was studded with factions expressing every view from mild reformism to the most extreme violence. Russian social‐ democracy was, in the beginning, steeped in the most venomous, implacable, and extravagantly expressed factional strife to the natural accompaniment of denunciations, splits, and excommunications.

Eventually, the movement was somewhat unified by the emergence of the Russian Social-Democratic party as an organized group from the Second Party Congress, which met in 1903 with a joint program representing twenty-six constituent organizations. But even this program, which was formally adhered to by all major Marxist groups until after the 1917 Revolution, contained enough ambiguities to allow the factional strife characteristic of the movement to go on even within a single party.

The Russian Social-Democratic program was twofold—maximum and minimum. The maximum program dealt with the ultimate goals of social-democracy: the abolition of the capitalist order and the establishment, via revolution, of a new socialist society under "the dictatorship of the proletariat." The minimum program had to do with immediate party tactics and structure: the overthrow of the tsarist autocracy, the establishment of a democratic republic, the eight-hour day, and so forth, including the restitution to the peasants of the land they were thought to have been deprived of in the emancipation of 1861.

But the unification that seemed to have been achieved in 1903 was only apparent. A crucial question—the recruiting of party members—led to a cleavage in the "unified" party that far surpassed all other factional struggles and, indeed, was never bridged. The party, without formally splitting, nevertheless divided into two great wings—the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. [\*](http://www.questiaschool.com/reader/action/next/99876634#*)

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| \* | The names themselves had a merely accidental character at first. At one point, the Martov group had refused to be represented in any party agencies, whereas Lenin happened to have a majority on the party organ, *Iskra* ("The Spark"). Only a handful of individuals was involved, but at one particular moment, because of their specific situation, Lenin and his group were called "Majoritarians," in Russian, *Bolsheviki*. The converse referred to the "Mensheviks" led by Martov. It was with this inconspicuous beginning that these names have since become associated with some of the most farreaching events in history. |

Even on the theoretical plane, the differences between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks were never formulated with clarity or even consistency. Broadly speaking, the Bolsheviks had an organizational preoccupation. Lenin wanted the party to consist of people whose lives were completely dedicated to the revolution—a band of "professional revolutionaries." The Mensheviks were satisfied as long as prospective recruits were "sympathetic" to the revolution; they would accept anyone who supported the movement intellectually, without necessarily participating in it personally. In a word, the Bolsheviks believed in the party caucus as the spearhead of the proletarian dictatorship; the Mensheviks were for the mass-meeting, or even the drawing room.

Toward the end of the century, populism was remolded in its new incarnation, the Social-Revolutionary party, a name devised in order to maneuver semantically between old-fashioned populism and the newer social-democracy. In 1900, it was formally established. The Social-Revolutionaries (SR's) retained the general complexion of the older populists, but, in spite of themselves, sometimes sounded like socialists, though not Marxists. The SR's believed that, since Russian capitalism was terribly weak, a collapse of the monarchy would automatically lead directly to socialism. Because of this, they were often wholeheartedly for cooperation with the liberal bourgeoisie against the autocracy. They continued to believe in the peasantry as the motor of the revolution and were implacably hostile to the concentrated bureaucratization they considered inherent in Marxism. But the chief contrast with the Marxists remained the Social-Revolutionaries' belief in terror as a politically effective weapon. This belief in terror was the chief cement binding the otherwise loosely associated party. The social-democrats, as I have indicated, thought terror not only pointless but pernicious.

For many years after its inception, the revolutionary movement was hampered by hopeless factionalism and, above all, by its small membership. In spite of their devotion, revolutionaries of all shades remained alien to the peasantry and, for a long time, to the working class as well. At the beginning of 1905—a year rich in dramatic events, in which tsarism was seriously shaken for the

first time—the Bolsheviks claimed no more than eight thousand members. Even this strength, however exaggerated, was derived primarily from the profound disaffection that gripped the country at large. The general disaffection lent point to the copious propaganda of all revolutionary groups.

It was not, in fact, until 1917 that it was realized—at least by the Bolsheviks—how important propaganda was in an age of modern technology when wielded by a limber, streamlined, and well-articulated party organization.

Before 1917, there was no feeling in Russia that anything senous was actually *happening*. In spite of the shock that the regime had received in 1905, its stability was quite unquestioned. The intelligentsia was being churned up by "ideas," but society at large was solidly rooted in its own respectability and the assurance of continuity that went with it.

It is only now that we can see the importance of the Russian revolutionary movement; while it was developing it seemed to be no more than a tempest in a teapot. The revolutionaries, after all, were a small minority; what seemed of consequence to prerevolutionary Russia was the upswing in liberalism.

This somewhat shapeless movement or, more accurately, sentiment, revolved around the goal of softening the autocracy; it was generally associated with the desire for a constitution. Liberal ideas, such as those of the populist and Marxist movements, were promoted toward the end of the nineteenth century, especially by the famine years of 1891-1892. But it would be misleading to try to sum up the variety of political attitudes in prerevolutionary Russia by fixing one specific label on them; the autocracy was separated from its irreconcilable enemies, the revolutionists, by the whole of organized society. The bulk of educated opinion in the country was critical of the bureaucratic tsarist state for its backwardness, arbitrariness, and inefficiency, but did not advocate violence.

**THE REVOLUTION OF 1905**

The social and political tension that had been accumulating at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth was relaxed to some extent by the Russo-Japanese War, which broke out in January 1904 and triggered the revolution of 1905. The autocracy benefited, for a short while, by the patriotic fervor aroused by even a basically unpopular war, but as the defeats inflicted on the utterly inefficient yet complacent Russian forces— underequipped, outfought, and humiliated by a series of defeats culminating in the surrender of Port Arthur—increased, the whole national opposition, including all shadings of liberal opinion, concerted a campaign against the autocracy. The celebrated incident that has gone down in Russian history as "Bloody Sunday" (January 9, 1905), when a peaceful demonstration led by a priest was fired on by troops, brought the tension to a head. For the first time, there was open agitation; the government failed to react except in a sluggish, indecisive way.

The opposition to the autocracy was expressed in two channels: conciliationist liberalism and revolutionary intransigence. The government was forced to concede the principle of popular representation, in the form of an advisory assembly, but even the liberals were not satisfied by this. They were intent on securing a constituent assembly based on the commonplaces of political democracy in Western Europe: universal suffrage and a secret, direct, and equal ballot.

The Russian fleet was annihilated by the Japanese in May 1905; the domestic situation also looked hopeless. There were agrarian upheavals, strikes, and political agitation on the part of liberal and revolutionary groups, countered by the partisans of the autocracy. A general strike broke out in September 1905, with the usual demands for a constituent assembly, civil liberties, and an eight-hour day. These demands were soon supplemented by purely revolutionary demands: a democratic republic, political amnesty, disarming of the police and troops, and the arming of workers.

The population was in a state of delirious excitement. Mobs roved about carrying red banners and revolutionary posters. Everything that could shut its doors did so—banks, shops, government offices, even pharmacies and hospitals. Newspapers, electricity, gas, and, in some places, water were all shut down; barricades were set up in a number of cities. The country was actually paralyzed.

**★ THE ST. PETERSBURG SOVIET**

An organization known as the St. Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies met for the first time in October 1905. This organization had come about almost casually, as a by-product of some autonomy that had been granted the universities in August 1905; academic audiences were turned into debating assemblies where speakers, safe from police interference, could talk freely. The Soviet had only thirty or forty delegates at first, but by the end of November it had almost six hundred. The elections to the Soviet had been carried out by the revolutionary parties, chiefly the Mensheviks, who dominated it.

On October 17, 1905, the day the first issue of the Soviet's organ, *Izvestiya*, appeared, Tsar Nicholas II issued a manifesto transforming Russia into a constitutional monarchy. It guaranteed basic civil liberties, promised to broaden the franchise underlying the advisory assembly, the State Duma, consented to in August 1905, and increased the authority of this duma.

The October Manifesto is a milestone in Russian political history. It evoked a reaction of unbridled excitement in the public at large, though liberals were somewhat skeptical, and conservatives, of course, outraged. The big cities were filled with parades, red banners, demonstrations, and counter-demonstrations. The conservative reaction took the form of pogroms against the Jews. The week after the October Manifesto was signed, hundreds of pogroms ravaged small towns inside and outside the Jewish "Pale of Settlement." They were generally condoned or even inspired by the police and created a disastrous impression outside Russia. Historically, the Jews, who in tsarist Russia numbered several mil

lion, have always served as a scapegoat or safety valve for oppressive regimes. In tsarist Russia, and even more recently, the Jews were ideal because of the deep-rooted anti-Semitism of the Russian—especially Ukrainian—masses; because they were so easily distinguishable; and because, in the early days of the revolutionary movement, they had played a role disproportionate to their numbers. Their unusual relative importance—before 1905, which saw the emergence of genuine Russian forces—made them an ideal target for conservative spleen, and, later on, for members of the revolutionary movement itself.

The St. Petersburg Soviet chose to disregard the October Manifesto and carry on with a general strike. The Soviet had become a revolutionary tribune; it proclaimed that the "proletariat would never lay down its arms" until the monarchy had been replaced by a democratic republic. The Soviet was able to sustain itself because of a freakish circumstance: the government was partially paralyzed by the fact that the October Manifesto laid down principles of liberty that the law obstructed or limited. The police were hamstrung. The result was that the Soviet could behave as an authoritative institution; it handed out orders and carried on negotiations with the government. Its activities were further stimulated by the return of many political exiles from abroad as the result of a partial amnesty declared a few days after the October Manifesto.

The revolutionary mood, naturally enough, infected the Russian hinterland. Over two thousand manor houses were burned or plundered and their owners killed or expelled.

**★ THE RETURN TO MONARCHY**

The government finally rallied from its momentary paralysis; it lay about it with a heavy hand, proclaiming a state of emergency and sending expeditions to suppress the riots. Early in December 1905 the principal leaders of the Soviet, including Leon Trotsky, were arrested and exiled. By January 1906, order had been restored. When Trotsky returned from exile in Siberia to St. Peters

burg, in March 1907, the revolution was in full ebb; he emigrated again, not to return until 1917.

The first modern revolution—rooted in industrial relations, dependent on the characteristic contemporary phenomenon of a highly industrialized working class, and powered by abstract ideas—was over. But, although the actual principle of autocracy was shattered, the monarchy had survived practically untouched. In other words, one idea had been replaced by another although the institution itself was unmarred. The social order had also emerged from the whirlwind unimpaired. The revolutionary forces seemed to have subsided once again, though they had nevertheless succeeded in forcing Russia to embark on the tentative, hesitant transformation of the vast illiterate empire, run by a correspondingly vast centralized bureaucratic regime, into a modern democracy.

Yet it is likely that such a transformation was inherently unviable by peaceful methods. There were only two bridges between the aristocratic and bourgeois summits of society and the impoverished, illiterate masses. One, the radical and idealistic intelligentsia, aimed at the total overturn of society through the power of its abstractions. The liberal classes that had rapidly been evolving during the latter part of the nineteenth century were the other. With no experience of self-government, and no parliamentary skills or deeply rooted political parties, the liberals were poorly equipped to provide a representative government for the vast, backward, multiracial empire. Perhaps the problem was insoluble. Before 1905, after all, there were no parties in Russia at all, and the Social-Democratic and Social-Revolutionary parties were fundamentally clandestine revolutionary organizations.

This state of embryonic democracy lasted until World War I; it was doubtless the shattering impact of the war on the essentially unstable, though seemingly rigid, tsarist society that created the conditions for the gigantic social and economic upheaval whose consequences are still evident.

n February 1917, when the "dress rehearsal" of 1905 was succeeded by the full-dress performance, it never entered anyone's head that a revolution was around the corner. It was not merely that official Russia, including the tsar and tsarina, did not suspect that things had reached a critical phase; even the most knowledgeable representatives of the left wing were also taken completely by surprise. It is true that Russia, submerged in the torment and drain of war, was experiencing unheard-of difficulties in conducting a gigantic enterprise it was quite unprepared for, but no one suspected that the strikes and bread riots that broke out toward the end of the month would trigger an entirely novel situation. Lenin, the ultimate victor of the 1917 upheaval, was exiled in Switzerland at the time; only forty-seven years old, he thought he was likely to die before any revolution took place in Russia and was even thinking of moving to the United States.

One of our most authoritative sources for the revolutionary period, Sukhanov, a nonparty socialist journalist and economist, says categorically, "Not one party was preparing for the great overturn." It is true that revolution—in general—constituted the entire life perspective of the revolutionaries; a revolution—in general—was considered inevitable, but at the given moment, even

in the midst of an exhausting war, it did not occur to anyone that the much-dreamed-about revolution could happen then and there, that it was an event that was conceivable from one moment to the next.

Indeed, there were no leaders of the revolution in Russia at all. Not only Lenin was in exile, but absolutely everyone whose name would have meant something to the masses. All the future Bolshevik leaders whose names were soon to be on everyone's lips were either living abroad, like Lenin and Trotsky, or in Siberian exile or prison, like Stalin and Kamenev. The same was true for both the Menshevik and the Social-Revolutionary leaders. The Bolsheviks had a skeleton staff in Russia, but its activities were restricted by the absence of the professional revolutionaries abroad and by the systematic espionage of the tsarist police.

Indeed, it seemed that the police were efficient. On paper all looked well with the military. St. Petersburg had a garrison of about 160,000 soldiers; there were police and Cossacks in case riots got out of hand. The tsar had an intricate plan for the repression of disorders. But it was not the paper dispositions that were to prove decisive. What ultimately undid the regime was the curious tenacity of the anonymous citizenry and the infectious unreliability of the garrison. St. Petersburg was so heavily charged with anger—it was the third winter of a war that was obviously going very badly—that even a small spark might have been expected to start a major explosion.

There had been a rash of small industrial strikes throughout January and February that kept nerves on edge. Also, because of the defective transport and distribution systems, workers and housewives often had to queue up for hours at a time in order to obtain supplies, including bread. There was no absolute shortage of bread, but, although the poorer people were not actually starving, they were being systematically irritated by the annoyances and deprivations of the war. This general mood of irritability was given substance by the increase in the number of industrial workers—some 400,000—because of the establishment of plants to serve the war effort.

**★ THE BEGINNINGS OF REVOLUTION**

The day that was to inaugurate the revolution, destroy the three‐ hundred-year-old Romanov dynasty, and launch Russia on a wholly novel career, was February 23. This was International Woman's Day, a socialist holiday. As usual, all the social-democratic groups were going to celebrate with meetings, speeches and leaflets. Not a single organization was calling for strikes, in spite of the many strikes that had taken place that winter. A "militant" Bolshevik organization was even actively opposing strikes.

The temper of the ordinary people in St. Petersburg was very tense. Any strike could easily have turned into an out-and-out fight. For this reason none of the political organizations was interested in promoting strikes. A fight that could not lead to a definite showdown would simply have been frustrating, and no one thought the situation ripe for militant action. Readiness for such action would have implied far greater strength in the parties and far more contacts between the workers and the soldiers.

Nevertheless, on the morning of February 23, in spite of orders to the contrary, some of the women in several textile factories went on strike; they sent delegates to the metalworkers asking for support. One of the local leaders in the workers' district, V. Kayurov, comments on this: "With reluctance the Bolsheviks agreed to this, and they were followed by the workers—Mensheviks and SR's. Once there is a mass strike one must call everybody into the street and take the lead."

The main problem for those people preparing to go out into "the street" was, of course, the possible reaction of the soldiers. It was wartime, after all, and the authorities were not going to stand for any nonsense. But the reserve soldiers drafted into a wartime army are not the regular peacetime army. Fundamentally, reserve soldiers are citizens; they are not hardened into a social category; they have roots connecting them with their families and homes. The tsarist regular army, on the other hand, was substantially alienated from the interests of the civilian population; it was a

special group. This fundamental problem had of course been copiously debated by all politically educated organizations, but since no one had the slightest idea that February 23 was going to have any special significance, the question seemed somewhat academic.

The initiative of the women textile-workers in coming out "into the street" is significant because it marks an action unauthorized by any politically conscious group. It is one of the reasons that the February revolution has often been called "spontaneous."

It is estimated that about 90,000 workers, both men and women, went on strike on February 23. The high spirits of the strikers were expressed in demonstrations, mass meetings, and occasional run-ins with the police. The Vyborg side of St. Petersburg, with an exceptionally high concentration of industrial establishments, was really a workers' district; this was where the movement into the streets began. In the course of the day, it shifted to the St. Petersburg side, the city proper. Some troops were called in to help the police, but the strikers did not run into any. A crowd of women made their way to the Town Hall, asking for bread. This demand was, of course, perfectly futile. Some red banners appeared here and there in the city, inscribed with slogans demanding bread and opposing autocracy and war.

Woman's Day passed with everyone in a relatively good temper; at nightfall, there was no reason to think anything in particular was happening.

The next day, the movement resumed at double strength. About half of the industrial workers in the city were on strike. The workers turned up at the factories in the morning, but, instead of starting work, they held meetings. They would then stream out of the factories and make their way toward the center of the city. The movement overflowed into new districts, attracting different elements of the population. Slogans of "Down with the Autocracy!" and "Down with the War!" became louder than the slogan "We Want Bread!" The Nevsky, the main avenue of the city, began to be inundated by crowds of people—first by workers singing revolutionary songs, then by middle-class people

with a scattering of blue-capped students. The ordinary, welldressed people promenading along the avenue were well-disposed to the processions; they waved to them in a friendly way. Some sick soldiers in army hospitals also waved a friendly hand at the workers.

Perhaps most significant was the behavior of the Cossacks, the traditional shield of the autocracy, who, though they constantly charged the crowds, did so with no real venom. Their horses covered with foam, the Cossacks would move at the demonstrators, who would open up to let them pass and then close ranks behind them. The word flew round the crowds that the Cossacks were not angry, that they would not shoot. Some individual workers seem to have had personal conversations with Cossacks; this reinforced the mood of trustfulness. It is true that later some angry, cursing, half-drunk dragoons (mounted infantrymen) charged at the crowd and struck at heads with their lances. But the mood of the demonstrators did not waver; they were convinced that even these dragoons would not shoot, and they did not.

That whole day of the twenty-fourth, throngs of people kept drifting from one section of the city to another. The police and cavalry detachments of the army, occasionally helped by infantry soldiers, kept dispersing them. But, significantly, among the yells of "Down with the Police!" an occasional, bizarre shout of approval for the Cossacks was heard.

There was a sharp differentiation in the behavior of the crowd with respect to the police and to the Cossacks. The police were universally detested; the crowd flung stones and chunks of ice at the mounted police. But the workers did their best to be tactful and friendly with the soldiers. Wherever there was a line of soldiers stationed, men and women workers would stand around making conversation with them. The importance of this is obvious; it implied that, if things became tense, that is, if the demonstration led to a conflict, the morale of the opposing camp had already been eroded.

**From February to October**

On 23 February 1917 thousands of female textile-workers and housewives took to the streets of Petrograd, the Russian capital, to protest about the bread shortage and to mark International Women's Day. The following day, more than 200,000 workers were on strike and demonstrators marched from the outlying districts into the city centre, hurling rocks and lumps of ice at police as they went. By 25 February, students and members of the middle classes had joined the protesters, who now bore placards proclaiming ‘Down with the War’ and ‘Down with the Tsarist Government’. On 26 February, soldiers from the garrison were ordered to fire on the crowds, killing hundreds. The next morning, the Volynskii regiment mutinied, its example quickly followed by other units. By 1 March, 170,000 soldiers swarmed among the insurgents, who were by this stage attacking prisons and police stations, arresting officials, and destroying tsarist ‘emblems of slavery’. A revolution had broken out, but not until 27 February did any of the revolutionary parties manage to give leadership to it. Looking back to the revolution of 1905, the moderate wing of the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party (RSDLP), the Mensheviks, called on workers and soldiers to elect delegates to a soviet, or council. Thus was born the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.

On the same day, members of the duma, or parliament, alarmed at disorders on the street, resolved to capitalize on the crisis in order to

extract political concessions from the tsar. Significantly, they persuaded the army generals that nothing short of Tsar Nicholas II's abdication could ensure the successful continuance of the war. On 2 March members of the duma went ahead without a formal mandate and established a provisional, or temporary, government. The next day, since his brother could not be persuaded to take the throne, Nicholas abdicated and the 300-year-old Romanov dynasty came to an ignominious end. In 1905 the autocracy had withstood the revolutionary movement for 12 months; in February 1917, deprived of the support from the army, it survived for less than 12 days.

The collapse of the autocracy was rooted in a crisis of modernization. From the 1860s, and particularly from the 1890s, the government tried hard to keep abreast militarily and economically of the major European powers by modernizing Russia's economy. By 1913 Russia had become the fifth largest industrial power in the world. However, economic modernization was carried out in an external and internal environment that was deeply threatening to the autocracy. The empire was challenged by Japan in the Far East, leading to war in 1904; by Germany in central Europe and the Ottoman empire; and in the decade up to 1914 by instability in the Balkans. Internally, the modernization was menaced by the deep social tensions that scarred this backward, poverty-stricken country. The government hoped that it could carry out modernization whilst maintaining tight control over society. Yet the effect of industrialization, urbanization, internal migration, and the emergence of new social classes was to set in train forces that served to erode the foundations of the autocratic state.

The difficulties of modernization were nowhere clearer than in agriculture. On the eve of the revolution, three-quarters of Russia's population was still engaged in farming. Russia had been the last country in Europe to abolish serfdom, but the emancipation of 1861 had left peasants feeling cheated, since the landed gentry kept roughly onesixth of the land – usually the best-quality land – and since the peasants

had to pay for the land they received at a price above its market value. Between 1860 and 1914 the population of the empire grew rapidly from 74 million to 164 million, putting intense pressure on land resources, especially in the central and Volga provinces where the black earth was very fertile. The average peasant allotment shrank by one-third between 1861 and 1900. The fact that by 1917 the landed gentry had lost almost half their land – much of it sold to peasants – and rented most of the remaining land to peasants, made little difference to how peasants felt.

In spite of increasing land hunger, peasant living standards were actually rising very slowly after 1891, although not in the central blackearth provinces. The rapid expansion of the market – stimulated by the construction of railways – allowed peasants to supplement their income from farming with work in industry, trade, handicrafts, or on the farms of the well-to-do; it also stimulated commercial production of grain, making Russia the world's leading grain exporter by 1913. Yet the average peasant still lived a life of poverty, deprivation, and oppression, one index of which was that infant mortality was the highest in Europe. Moreover, notwithstanding the expansion of commercial farming, agriculture continued to be technically primitive, based on the threefield system and strip farming, with little use of fertilizer or machinery. In spite of clear signs that agriculture was beginning to commercialize, then, the agrarian system as a whole remained backward and the peasantry deeply alienated.

By 1914, 18% of the empire's population was urban. Towns grew rapidly, mainly as a result of peasant migration, and this put immense strain on the urban infrastructure. Overcrowding, high rents, and appalling squalor were the norm in the big cities. Incompetent municipal authorities, dogged by an inadequate tax base (there was no income tax until 1916), proved unable to cope with rising levels of disease and mortality. St Petersburg – which changed its name to Petrograd during the First World War – enjoyed the dubious distinction of being the most

unhealthy capital in Europe. In 1908 more than 14,000 people died in a cholera epidemic. In the burgeoning towns, the traditional system of social estates, which defined the fiscal and military obligations of the tsar's subjects according to whether they belonged to the nobility, clergy, merchantry, or peasantry, was breaking down. New classes, such as the professional and commercial middle classes, the industrial bourgeoisie, and the working class, were emerging, posing demands on the system that it was not designed to accommodate.

As early as the 1830s a social group had emerged that stood outside the system of social estates. This was the characteristically Russian group known as the intelligentsia, defined less by its socio-economic position than by its critical stance towards the autocracy. Liberal and socialist in its politics, it did much in the course of 70 years to erode the legitimacy of the autocracy, not least by providing a steady flow of members to the terrorist and socialist groups that struggled to overthrow the system by violent revolution. By the turn of the 20th century, the intelligentsia was becoming less clearly defined, as professional and commercial middle classes emerged, as the middle and upper ranks of the bureaucracy became professionalized, and as mass commercial culture developed. The professional and commercial middle classes had been slow to develop in Russia, but by the time revolution broke out in 1905 they were making their mark on society. A civil society was emerging, manifest in the professional associations of lawyers, doctors, and teachers, in voluntary associations of a charitable or reformist type, in the expansion of universities, and especially in the explosion of publishing.

In 1905 the intelligentsia and the middle classes together campaigned for the autocracy to give them civil and political rights and establish a constitutional political order. They thus played a role similar to that which in western Europe had been performed by a more economically defined bourgeoisie. In Russia, however, the capitalist class was politically unassertive, deeply segmented by region and branch of

industry, and tied to the traditional merchant estate. Industrialists in key sections of the mining, metallurgy, and engineering industries relied on the state for orders, subsidies, and preferential tariffs, and showed little will to confront it.

The growth of an industrial proletariat posed a challenge of a different kind. In 1917 there were still only 3.6 million workers in Russia's factories and mines, yet their concentration in particular regions and in relatively large enterprises gave them a political clout out of all proportion to their numbers. Mainly recruited from the peasants – ‘snatched from the plough and hurled into the factory furnace’ in L. D. Trotsky's memorable phrase – they varied considerably in the extent to which they were tied to the land, involved in urban culture, educated, and skilled. There were big differences, for example, between the skilled metalworkers of Vyborg district in Petrograd, the textileworkers of the Moscow industrial region, and the workers from the mining settlements of the Urals. Nevertheless the proportion of workers who had severed their ties with the village and who were becoming socialized into the urban-industrial environment was increasing. Towns provided workers with cultural opportunities, such as evening classes, clubs, libraries, theatres, and mass entertainment, and exposed them to the subversive political ideas of Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries. The wretched conditions in which workers lived, the drudgery of their work, and their pitiful wages heightened their sense of separateness not only from the government but from privileged society in general.

Following the general strike of 1905, the autocracy conceded limited legalization of trade unions, but employers showed little desire to reform the authoritarian system of industrial relations. Moreover, since the response of the authorities to strikes and demonstrations was to send in police and Cossacks, workers were easily politicized, seeing in the state and capitalists a single mechanism of oppression. Deprived of the chance to pursue improvement by gradualistic means, Russian industry, and tied to the traditional merchant estate. Industrialists in key sections of the mining, metallurgy, and engineering industries relied on the state for orders, subsidies, and preferential tariffs, and showed little will to confront it.

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workers became the most strike-prone in Europe: in 1905–6 and again in 1912–14, the annual number of strikers was equivalent to almost threequarters of the factory workforce.

In October 1905, under intense pressure from the ‘all-nation struggle’ of the labour movement and the middle-class and gentry opposition, Nicholas II, in the October Manifesto, conceded an elected legislature, or duma, plus substantial civil rights. The revolution had exposed the vulnerability of the autocracy, but it also rekindled the reformist energies of the bureaucracy. Nowhere was this more apparent than in Prime Minister P. A. Stolypin's bold legislation to allow peasants to separate from the agricultural commune by consolidating their land holdings into private plots. Many of the middle classes, alarmed by the extent of worker and peasant insurgency, were ready to work with a constitutional monarchy in the interests of social reform. Yet the massive unrest in the countryside in 1906–7, which saw the burning and looting of gentry estates, together with the radicalism shown by peasants in elections to the first and second dumas in 1906 and 1907, demonstrated the perils of controlled modernization.

Once the revolutionary storm had died down, Stolypin in June 1907 launched a ‘coup’ against the duma, limiting its power and drastically reducing peasant representation. Thereafter the regime became steadily more isolated. The middle classes continued to support the faltering efforts at reform, but felt betrayed by the way in which Nicholas and his ministers clawed back the concessions granted in the October Manifesto. Workers, needless to say, remained profoundly alienated from the regime and from the wealthy and privileged classes. More worryingly, the autocracy was losing its traditional supporters. The 1905 revolution had destroyed peasant loyalty to their ‘little father’ the tsar, and the Stolypin reforms failed by 1914 to create a layer of conservative farmers who might have provided a new base for the regime. The authority of the Orthodox Church was in decline and the once liberal gentry, debt-ridden and aghast at peasant insurgency,

harried the bureaucracy for failing to protect its interests. Finally, the project of orderly modernization was also threatened by the appearance of nationalism among the non-Russian peoples of the empire.

In 1906 the tsarist state was weak but not necessarily doomed. Orderly modernization in a world of intensifying competition between empirenations and in a society torn by social conflict was never going to be easy. But it might have succeeded had the resolve of the regime not been undermined by the unwillingness of the tsar to tolerate any weakening of his authority. The tsar sincerely believed that, as God's appointed representative, he did not have the right to compromise his power. The omens were evident in the first line of Basic Law of 1906, which ostensibly enshrined a constitutional monarchy: ‘To the AllRussian Emperor belongs the Supreme Autocratic Power.’ Consequently, by 1907, with the revolutionary crisis at an end, the regime began to retreat from its commitment to open up the political process to new social forces. By 1913–14, Russia's cities were once again awash with conflict. Nevertheless the autocracy collapsed not because of its unwillingness to reform, nor even because of the intrinsic contradictions of controlled modernization, acute though these had become, but because of the First World War.

The war marked a watershed in Europe's history, destroying empires, discrediting liberal democracy, preparing the way for the totalitarian politics of the 1920s and 1930s. It exposed all the belligerents to the severest of tests and found the Russian autocracy wanting. The war had a devastating impact on the empire. Over 14 million men were mobilized; about 67 million people in the western provinces came under enemy occupation; over 6 million were forcibly displaced, of whom half a million were Jews expelled from front-line areas. The eastern front was less static than the western, but neither side was able to make a decisive breakthrough and offensives proved hugely costly. Perhaps 3.3 million died or were lost without trace – a higher mortality than any other belligerent power (although Germany had a higher number of

counted dead) – and the total number of casualties reached over 8 million. The mass slaughter and seething hatreds to which the war gave rise fatally compromised the chances of democracy after the autocracy had been overthrown.

They drove us and we went. Where was I going and why? To kill the Germans! But why? I didn't know. I arrived in the trenches, which were terrifying and appalling. I listened as our company commander beat a soldier, beat him about the head with a whip. Blood poured from the poor man's head. Well, I thought, as soon as he begins to beat me, I'll skewer him with my bayonet and be taken prisoner. I thought who really is my enemy: the Germans or the company commander? I still couldn't see the Germans, but here in front of me was the commander. The lice bit me in the trenches. I was overcome with dejection. And then as we were retreating I was taken prisoner.

F. Starunov, a peasant conscript in the First World War

Russian soldiers fought valiantly and generally successfully against Turks and Austrians, but proved no match for the German army in matters of organization, discipline, and leadership. General Brusilov's offensive of June 1916, however, testified to the resilience of the Russian soldiers and by that stage the army had overcome the shortage of shells that had dogged its first months in the field. When the February Revolution came, it was not as the result of military defeat, or even of war weariness, but as the result of the collapse of public confidence in the government.

In November 1915, after a disastrous first year of battle, Nicholas took personal command of the armed forces. Though diligent, he had neither the ability nor imagination to coordinate the external and the home fronts and stubbornly resisted calls from the duma for a ‘government of public confidence’. The empress Alexandra interfered erratically in

government and her devotion to the peasant holy man, Rasputin, set rumours flying of sexual shenanigans and treason by ‘dark forces’ at court. These alienated not only the common people but also many officials, generals, and aristocrats from what was perceived to be a ‘proGerman’ court. Meanwhile the bureaucracy, never known for its efficiency, buckled under the punishing demands of ‘total war’. So disgusted were the middle classes with the ineptitude of the official supply organs that the Union of Towns and the Union of Zemstvos, the organs of local government in the countryside, took on the task of organizing supplies and services for the army. It proved impossible, however, to mobilize transport, industry, and fuel for the army without undermining the civilian economy.

The government financed the war by raising taxes and foreign loans and by massively increasing the amount of paper currency in circulation. The result was a vast increase in government debt and rising inflation. Prices tripled between 1914 and 1916, while wages doubled. Industrialists made record profits, while workers struggled to make ends meet. By 1916 the intensity of industrial strikes again approached the level of the pre-war period; in January–February 1917 more workers participated in political strikes than in 1913. By the winter, the cities were facing an acute food shortage in a country glutted with food. Asked in January 1917 by Sir George Buchanan, the British Ambassador, how he proposed to regain his subjects' confidence, Nicholas retorted: ‘Do you mean that I am to regain the confidence of my people, or that they are to regain mine?’

**The meanings of the revolution**

The February Revolution gave rise to a short-lived mood of national unity and optimism. Liberty and democracy were the order of the day. Overnight everyone was transformed from a subject into a citizen, all agreeing that they must organize in order to realize their freedom. The extraordinary euphoria of public life was captured by V. I. Lenin's wife,

Nadezda Krupskaia, upon her return to Russia in early April: ‘Everywhere people stood about in knots, arguing heatedly and discussing the latest events. Discussion that nothing could interrupt!’ Yet from the first, the scope of the revolution was in dispute. For the reluctant revolutionaries of the Provisional Government the overthrow of the tsar was an act of national self-preservation driven by the need to bring victory in war. For the lower classes, liberty and democracy meant nothing short of a social revolution that would bring about the complete destruction of the old structure of authority and the construction of a new way of life in accordance with their ideas of justice and freedom. It was only a matter of time before the social contradictions masked by the common political language would become exposed.

Nine million soldiers and sailors hailed the downfall of the tsar, seeing the revolution as a signal to overthrow the oppressive command structure in the armed forces. Tyrannical officers were removed and sometimes lynched (about 50 officers were murdered by the sailors of

Kronstadt). Insisting that they were citizens of a free Russia, soldiers demanded the right to form committees from the company level upwards to represent their interests. This demand was conceded by the Petrograd Soviet on 1 March, when it passed Order No. 1, the most radical act it ever carried out. General M. V. Alekseev condemned it as ‘the means by which the army I command will be destroyed’. Yet the committees were dominated by more educated elements who had little intention of sabotaging the operational effectiveness of the army. In spring at least, democratization did not mean the disintegration of the army as a fighting force. The mood of the soldiers was characterized by Lenin as one of ‘revolutionary defencism’, by which he meant that soldiers would only fight to defend the gains of the revolution against Austro-German militarism. Hopes for a rapid peace settlement, however, ran high and no one could be confident that the army would continue to fight indefinitely. In particular, it was not clear that the army would go on the attack.

Industrial workers were the most organized and strategically positioned of all social groups in 1917. Upon their return to work, following the end of the general strike, they, too, set about dismantling ‘autocracy’ on the shop floor. Hated foremen and administrators were driven out, the old rule books were torn up, and factory committees were formed, especially among the skilled metalworkers, to represent workers' interests to management. Everywhere they demanded an eight-hour working day and wage rises to compensate for wartime inflation, both demands conceded with considerable reluctance by employers. The factory committees took on a wide range of functions, including guarding factory property, overseeing hiring and firing, labour discipline, and organizing food supplies. By October two-thirds of enterprises with 200 or more workers had such committees. Had economic and political conditions been more favourable, it is possible that they might have become part of a corporatist system of industrial relations, taking joint responsibility with employers for production. Meanwhile more slowly, trade unions

also revived, taking particular responsibility for wage negotiations. By October they had over 2 million members, organized by industry rather than craft.

The soviets were the principal organ of political expression for the workers and soldiers. Some 700 soviets sprang up in March and April, embracing around 200,000 deputies by summer. By October there were 1,429 soviets, of which 455 were soviets of peasants' deputies. Peasant soviets, however, did not really get off the ground until the end of 1917. Soviets saw themselves as organs of the ‘revolutionary democracy’ – a bloc comprising workers, soldiers, and peasants, and occasionally stretching (as in Omsk) to include representatives of ethnic minorities and even teachers, journalists, lawyers, and doctors. Their basic principle was that they were directly elected by those they represented and directly accountable to them. During the spring and summer, the moderate socialists, the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), were the leading force in the soviets, because their brand of inclusive politics was most in tune with the popular mood. The moderate socialists saw the function of the soviets as being to exercise ‘control’ over local government in the interests of the revolutionary democracy; but in practice many local soviets quickly took on administrative responsibilities in matters as various as food and fuel supply, education and culture, and law and order. At the beginning of June at the First AllRussian Congress of Soviets, out of 777 delegates, 285 were SRs and 248 were Mensheviks. The Congress brought into being a national soviet centre, the Central Executive Committee (CEC), controlled by Mensheviks and SRs, that became a bastion of support for the Provisional Government.

The peasants too responded warmly to the February Revolution. Few mourned the passing of the Romanov dynasty and thousands of resolutions were passed by village communities, applauding the fact that peasants were now citizens and demanding that the social order be reconstructed on the basis of democracy, justice, and equality. Peasant resolutions expressed hope that the war would soon be over, but their principal aspiration was to redress the wrong done to them in 1861 by redistributing the gentry's estates. Although there were only about 100,000 landlord families by 1917, few countries in the world still had estates as large as those in Russia. In the eyes of the peasants, the gentry had no right to these estates since they did not work them. In the moral universe of the peasantry it was an article of faith that only those who made the land productive had a right to it. In one of Tolstoy's fables, the peasants of a village judge strangers by the state of their hands: only if their palms are calloused will they take them in.

**Dual power**

**Soviet Order No. 1:**  
1. Committees to be elected immediately from the ranks of all military and naval units  
2. One delegate from each company to be elected to the Petrograd Soviet  
3. Armed forces are subordinate to the Petrograd Soviet in all their political actions  
4. Orders of Military Commission of the Duma are to be carried out only if they do not conflict with the orders of the Petrograd Soviet  
5. All weapons to remain under the control of company and battalion committees, and in no circumstances to be handed over to officers  
6. While on duty soldiers must observe strict military discipline, but off-duty soldiers enjoy the same rights as other citizens; saluting off-duty is abolished  
7. Honorific titles of officers are abolished (Your Excellency)  
8. All coarse conduct by officers towards soldiers (use of the familiar ty) is abolished, and cases of it must be reported to the committee.

The two forces that brought down the monarchy – the mass movement of workers and soldiers and the middle-class parliamentary opposition – became institutionalized in the new political set-up, the Petrograd Soviet keeping a watchful eye over the Provisional Government. The government, headed by Prince G. E. Lvov, a landowner with a long record of service to the zemstvos, was broadly representative of professional and business interests. It was liberal, even mildly populist, in its politics; the only organized force within it was the Kadet party, once a liberal party but now evolving rapidly in the direction of conservative nationalism. In its manifesto of 2 March, the government pledged to implement a far-reaching programme of civil and political rights and to convoke a Constituent Assembly. Significantly, it said nothing about the burning issues of war and land. The government, which had no popular mandate, saw its principal task as being to oversee the election of a Constituent Assembly, which would determine the shape of the future polity. It believed that only such an assembly had the authority to resolve such pressing issues as land redistribution.

The Petrograd Soviet enjoyed the real attributes of power since it controlled the army, transport, and communications, as well as vital means of information. It also had a popular mandate insofar as 1,200 deputies were elected to it within the first week. A few Bolsheviks, anarchists, and others pressed the Soviet to assume full power, but the moderate socialist intellectuals who controlled its executive committee believed that this was not appropriate to a revolution whose character they defined as ‘bourgeois’, i.e. as destined to bring about democracy and capitalist development in Russia rather than socialism. In addition, they feared that any attempt to assert their authority would provoke ‘counter-revolution’. Consequently, they agreed to support but not to join the ‘bourgeois’ Provisional Government, so long as it did not override the interests of the people. The radical lawyer A. F. Kerensky alone of the Petrograd Soviet representatives determined to join the government, portraying himself as the ‘hostage of the democracy’ within it. Thus was born ‘dual power’. In spite of the prevailing mood of national unity, it reflected the deep division in Russian society between the ‘democracy’ and ‘propertied society’.

Outside Petrograd dual power was much less in evidence. In most localities a broad alliance of social groups formed committees of public organizations to eject police and tsarist officials, maintain order and food supply, and to oversee the democratization of the town councils and zemstvos. The government endeavoured to enforce its authority by appointing commissars, most of whom were chairs of county zemstvos and thus representatives of landed or business interests. By summer the parallel existence of the committees, the commissars, the town councils and zemstvos – which by this stage were undergoing democratic election – and the soviets reflected the deep fragmentation of power in provincial towns and cities. In rural areas peasants expelled land captains, township elders, and village policemen and set up township committees under their control. The government attempted to strengthen its authority by setting up land and food committees at township level, but these too fell under peasant control. At the very lowest level the authority of the village gathering was strengthened by the revolution, although it became ‘democratized’ by the participation of younger sons, landless labourers, village intelligentsia (scribes, teachers, vets, and doctors), and some women. The February Revolution thus devolved power to the localities and substantially reduced the capacity of the Provisional Government to make its writ run beneath the county level.

Until autumn the popular organizations everywhere were dominated by the Mensheviks and SRs. The Mensheviks had originated as a faction of the RSDLP in 1903 after they objected to Lenin's model of a vanguard party, fearing that professional revolutionaries would substitute themselves for the working class. As orthodox Marxists, they believed that Russia did not yet have the prerequisites for socialism: a developed industry and a large working class. Because many – possibly most – RSDLP organizations in the provinces had declined to split along factional lines, it is difficult to estimate how many Mensheviks there were in 1917. By May, there were probably around 100,000 – half of them in Georgia – rising to nearly 200,000 by autumn. The SRs, led by

V. M. Chernov, were by far the largest party in 1917. They rejected the Marxist view of the peasantry as petty-bourgeois, believing that the principles of collectivism inherent in the peasant commune made Russia peculiarly fitted for socialism. For this reason, and because they put so much energy into organizing the peasantry during 1905–7, they were seen as the party of the peasantry. By autumn 1917, however, alongside 700,000 members in the army and in the villages, the SRs had 300,000 members in the towns, making them as significant an urban force as the Bolsheviks. The question of whether or not to support the tsarist government in the war had split both Mensheviks and SRs deeply. These internal splits deepened in the course of 1917, especially among the SRs. Their right wing called for war to victory; their centre faction, led by Chernov, shifted a long way from its principles in pursuit of the coalition with the bourgeoisie; while the left wing, who became the Left SRs, increasingly took up a programme that differed little from that of the Bolsheviks.

Despite the talk of ‘unity of the vital forces of the nation’, the issue of policy on the war put a great strain on the alliance between the Petrograd Soviet and the government. All sections of the populace hoped that the revolution would bring about a speedy peace and most of the moderate socialists on the Soviet executive had been opposed to the war hitherto. The Georgian Menshevik I. G. Tsereteli crafted a policy designed, on the one hand, to press the government to seek a comprehensive peace settlement, based on the renunciation of all annexations and indemnities, and on the other, to persuade soldiers that it was their duty to go on defending Russia until peace came about. The Provisional Government formally accepted this policy, but many of its members favoured war to victory. On 20 April, a note to the Allies from the Foreign Minister, P. N. Miliukov, leader of the Kadets, revealed his support for Allied war aims, as set out in secret treaties, which *inter alia* promised Russia the straits at the mouth of the Black Sea as the prize of victory. Immediately, outraged soldiers and workers took to the streets of Petrograd to demand Miliukov's resignation. Among them

could be seen Bolshevik banners proclaiming ‘Down with the Provisional Government’. On 2 May Miliukov was forced to resign and Prince Lvov insisted that members of the Soviet executive join a coalition government to resolve the crisis.

Having entered the government to speed the conclusion of peace, the six socialists who sat alongside eight ‘bourgeois’ ministers found themselves embroiled in preparations for war. Kerensky, the new War Minister, was determined to see the Russian army launch a new offensive out of a desire to see Russia honour her treaty obligations to the Allies. It was clear, however, that many units were reluctant to go on the attack. Kerensky toured the fronts frenetically, whipping up support. In the event only 48 battalions refused to go into action. The offensive quickly turned into a rout. Losses amounted to 400,000 men and the number of deserters was even greater. From now on indiscipline turned into organized disobedience, as the committees fell increasingly under the sway of principled opponents of the war such as Left SRs and Bolsheviks. In retrospect – although this was not evident at the time – this can be seen as the beginning of the end for the Provisional Government, since no government can long survive without control over the armed forces.

Until June the Bolsheviks remained on the margin of politics. On 3 April Lenin, the party's founder and undisputed leader, returned after almost 16 years in exile. He was a man of iron will and self-discipline, personally modest yet supremely self-confident and intolerant of opponents. His politics were rooted in Marxist theory, which he sought to adapt to Russian conditions, yet he had a capacity to make sharp adjustments to policy and to take tough decisions. Upon his return, his contempt for liberalism and parliamentarianism, his implacable opposition to the ‘imperialist’ war, and his appreciation of the mass appeal of soviets caused him to take up what appeared to be very extreme positions. In fact his extremism oriented him well towards the underlying realities of politics. L. B. Kamenev and I. V. Stalin, upon their return from Siberian

exile on 12 March, had committed the party to conditional support for the Provisional Government, a revolutionary defencist position on the war, and to negotiations with the Mensheviks to reunify the RSDLP. In his *April Theses* Lenin denounced each of these policies, insisting that there should be no support for the government of ‘capitalists and landlords’, that the character of the war had changed not one jot, and that the Bolsheviks should campaign for power to be transferred to the soviets. Crucially, Lenin concluded that the revolution was moving from its ‘bourgeois’ stage towards the socialist stage, the First World War having convinced him that capitalism was in its death throes and that socialism was now on the agenda internationally. Trotsky, who had clashed swords with Lenin on many occasions in his Menshevik past, welcomed this conversion to views closer to his own.

In 1917 the Bolshevik party was very different from the tightly knit conspiratorial party advocated by Lenin in 1903. Though more unified than the SRs, Mensheviks, and anarchists, the Bolsheviks were a diverse lot and even after Lenin's *April Theses* became official policy, the gradualist views of Kamenev and G. E. Zinoviev (dubbed ‘Lenin's mad dog’ by the Mensheviks) continued to enjoy strong support. Alongside cadres who had endured years of persecution, tens of thousands of workers, soldiers, and sailors flooded into the party, knowing little Marxism, but seeing in the Bolsheviks the most committed defenders of the working class. Bolsheviks were indefatigable in agitating for their policies in factories and on street corners. The result was that party membership rose from perhaps 10,000 in March to nearly 400,000 by October.

On the afternoon of 3 July, soldiers of the First Machine-Gun Regiment, angry at the failure of the June offensive and determined not to be sent to the front, took to the streets to demand that power be transferred to the soviets. Joined by 20,000 Kronstadt sailors and thousands of workers, they precipitated the severest crisis of the government to date, known as the July Days, a crisis compounded by the resignation of the

Kadet ministers from the government. Rank-and-file Bolsheviks, including members of the party's Military Organization, were involved in calling the demonstration, but the Central Committee was alarmed at the initiative, since it did not believe that the time was ripe for the overthrow of the government. When the movement showed no sign of abating, however, it resolved to lead it. On 4 July a semi-insurrection got underway, as armed soldiers surrounded the headquarters of the government. However, the latter was able to bring in reliable military units and scattered the insurgents. Tsereteli anguished that ‘it fell to me as Minister of Internal Affairs to apply repressive methods against those who in the past had been my comrades in the struggle for freedom.’ Kerensky ordered ‘severe retribution’ against the Bolsheviks whom he branded ‘German agents’. Orders were issued for the arrest of Lenin, Trotsky, and other leading Bolsheviks, causing Lenin to flee to Finland and the others to be jailed. It looked as though the Bolsheviks were a spent force. Kerensky delighted in his triumph.

**The nationalist challenge**

The 1897 census revealed that Russians comprised only 44% of the total population of the empire. The more accurate 1926 census recognized the existence of 194 different ethnic groups, varying enormously in size, language, religion, culture, and level of socio-economic development. Nationalist movements had first posed a challenge to the autocracy in 1905 and during the war many became radicalized as the peripheral regions of the empire experienced foreign occupation and evacuation, as Polish and Latvian regiments were formed within the tsarist army, and as Allied propaganda circulated about national self-determination as an Allied war aim. Nationalism, however, was extremely unevenly developed across the empire. Among the 18 million Muslims, for example, it was a weak force. Only the Tatars of the middle Volga, Urals, and Crimea, a scattered population interspersed with Russians, showed much political consciousness and they tended to support a pan-Islamic solution – i.e. extra-territorial, cultural autonomy for all Muslims within a unitary Russian state – rather than a nationalist solution based on each ethnic group having its own national territory. Among the biggest concentration of Muslims in Turkestan – a vast region, which ranged from the northern desert steppe (modern Kazakhstan) east to the khanates of Khiva and Kokand and the emirate of Bukhara, each based on oases and river agriculture – there was barely any ethnic awareness, identities being defined in terms of clans, villages, and oases or, at the macro-level, in terms of the commonwealth of Islam. By contrast, in the Baltic region, the dominance of Germans, together with periodic campaigns of Russification by the tsarist state, had stimulated rather strong nationalist movements, in spite of the fact that neither Latvia nor Estonia had any history of independent statehood.

The Provisional Government seriously underestimated the destabilizing power of nationalism in 1917, fondly imagining that the abrogation of discriminatory legislation would ‘solve’ the national question. After February, the most common nationalist demands were not for outright

secession but for rights of cultural self-expression and for a measure of political autonomy within the framework of a federal Russian state. Typical was the slogan of the liberal and socialist politicians of the Ukrainian Rada, or National Council: ‘Long Live Autonomous Ukraine in a Federated Russia’. Only in the untypical cases of Poland and Finland – where existing states had retained some autonomy after incorporation into the empire – did nationalists demand complete separation. By contrast, in the equally untypical cases of Armenia and Georgia, where nationalism was also strong – both countries having long histories as political entities and their own Christian churches – politicians tended to support the Provisional Government. In the case of the Armenians, who were dispersed between Russia, Turkey, and Persia, the genocide unleashed against them by Turks during the war led the moderate socialist party, known as Dashnaktsutiun, to support the Provisional Government out of fear of Turkey. In Georgia the nationalist movement was dominated by Mensheviks, who had forged a mass movement based on the working class and, unusually, on the peasantry. Naturally, they were close to the Provisional Government.

Among the non-Russian masses demands for radical social and economic policies generally eclipsed purely nationalist demands. In general, peasants preferred parties that spoke to them in their own tongue and defended local interests, but they would only support nationalists when they backed their own struggles against the landed gentry. In Ukraine, the nationalist movement was politically divided, weakened by pronounced regional divisions, and limited by the fact that nearly a quarter of the population, concentrated in the towns, was Russian, Jewish, or Polish. Nevertheless the socio-economic grievances of the peasantry had an ethnic dimension since most landowners were Russians or Poles. The middle-class politicians of the Rada were forced to take an increasingly radical stance on the land question in order to maintain peasant support. As this suggests, nationalism was strongest where it was underpinned by powerful class sentiment. In Latvia, for example, a large working class and lower middle class faced a

ommercial and industrial bourgeoisie that was Jewish, Russian, or Polish. In 1917 nationalist politicians of a liberal or moderate socialist hue rapidly lost ground to Latvian Social Democracy which had a base among workers and landless peasants, the latter hating the ‘grey barons’, or Latvian farmers, almost as much as the German nobility. Generally, workers in the non-Russian areas were more likely to respond to class politics than to nationalism. In the Donbas and the cities of eastern Ukraine, for example, there was a strong working class, but it comprised Russians and Russianized Ukrainians who supported the panRussian struggle for soviet power rather than a strictly nationalist agenda.

As 1917 wore on, nationalist politicians steadily stepped up their demands for autonomy, partly in the face of obduracy by the Provisional Government, partly as politics in general radicalized. In Estonia the government redrew administrative boundaries along ethnic lines after February but the elected assembly, known as Maapäev, was dissatisfied with the extent of autonomy on offer. Challenged from the left by Russian-dominated soviets, it steadily moved towards demanding complete autonomy. The reluctance of the government to concede meaningful autonomy was motivated partly by fear that nationalist movements were a Trojan horse for Germany, and by deep attachment to a unified Russian state, especially strong among the Kadets. This was particularly evident in relation to Ukraine. With approximately 22% of the empire's population, Ukraine was by far the largest minority area, and its resources of grain, coal, and iron, together with its strategic position, made it of paramount importance to the government. The latter resisted the Rada's demands for limited devolution of power, with the result that it moved steadily in the direction of separatism. When in September Kerensky finally endorsed the principle of self-determination ‘but only on such principles as the Constituent Assembly shall determine’, it was too little, too late, and in November the Rada declared Ukraine a republic.

**Social polarization**

At the root of the crisis that overtook the Provisional Government after July lay a serious deterioration of the economy. In the first half of 1917 production of fuel and raw materials fell by at least a third, with the result that many enterprises closed temporarily or permanently. By October, nearly half a million workers had been laid off. The crisis was aggravated by mounting chaos in the transport system, which led to a shortage of bread in the cities. Between July and October prices rose fourfold and the real value of wages plummeted. Between February and October 2.5 million workers went on strike mainly for higher wages, but though strikes increased in scale during the autumn, especially in the Central Industrial Region close to Moscow, they became ever harder to win outright.

We demand that the Ministry of Labour speedily order the factory owners and industrialists to stop their game of ‘cat and mouse’ and immediately undertake the increased extraction of coal and ore and also the production of agricultural tools and equipment, so as to reduce the number of unemployed and halt the closure of factories. If Messrs Capitalists will not pay attention to our demand, then we, the workers of the iron-rolling shop, demand complete control of all branches of industry by the toiling people. Of you capitalists, weeping your crocodile tears, we demand that you stop crying about devastation that you yourselves have created. Your cards are on the table. Your game is up.

Resolution of the general meeting of the iron-rolling shop of the Putilov works, August 1917

The factory committees responded to the crisis by implementing workers' control of production. Being the labour organizations closest

to the rank-and-file, the committees were the first to register the shift in working-class sentiment away from the moderate socialists towards the Bolsheviks. The first conference of Petrograd factory committees at the end of May overwhelmingly passed a Bolshevik resolution on control of the economy. As the economy began to collapse, the factory committees mobilized to prevent what they saw as widespread ‘sabotage’ by the employers. Workers' control signified the close monitoring of the activities of management; it was not intended to displace management but to ensure that management did not lay off workers in order to maintain profits. Employers, however, resented any infringement of their ‘right to manage’ and class conflict flared up on a dramatic scale. In the Donbas and Urals employers abandoned the ailing mines and metallurgical plants, leaving the committees struggling to maintain production. The idea of workers' control had not emanated from any political party, but the willingness of Bolsheviks, anarchists, and Left SRs to support it was a major factor in their growing popularity. By contrast, the insistence of moderate socialists that workers' control merely exacerbated chaos in the economy turned workers against them.

In the countryside conflict also began to increase during the summer. The first signs of trouble came when peasants resisted government attempts to get them to hand over grain. The war had seen a fall in the volume of grain marketed – it fell from one-quarter of the harvest before 1914 to one-sixth by 1917 – since peasants had no incentive to sell grain when there were no goods to buy and when the currency was losing its value. Concerned to feed the army and the towns, the government introduced a state monopoly on the sale of grain, but its attempts to induce peasants to sell grain at fixed prices provoked antagonism, peasants preferring to conceal grain or turn it into moonshine. More ominously, peasants grew restive at the slow progress towards solving the land question. The government had set up an unwieldy structure of land committees to prepare the details of the reform, thereby heightening peasant expectations, but was loath to  
begin land redistribution while millions of soldiers were still in the field. In addition, it was torn between the Kadets, who insisted that landlords must be fully recompensed for land taken from them, and Chernov, the Minister of Agriculture, who wished to see the orderly transfer of gentry estates to the land committees. From early summer, peasants began to take the law into their own hands. They acted cautiously at first, unilaterally reducing or refusing to pay rents, grazing cattle illegally, stealing wood from the landlord's forests, and, increasingly, taking over uncultivated tracts of gentry land on the pretext that this would boost the nation's grain supply. In the non-black-earth zone, where dairy and livestock farming were paramount, peasants concentrated on getting their hands on meadowland and pasture. Because of the inability of local authorities to react, illegal acts soared, levelling off somewhat during the harvest, but climbing sharply again from September. By autumn peasants were seizing the land, equipment, and livestock on gentry estates and redistributing them outright, especially in Ukraine. As one peasant explained: ‘The *muzhiki* (peasant men) are destroying the squires’ nests so that the little bird will never return.'

By summer the discourse of democracy put into circulation by the February Revolution was being overtaken by a discourse of class, a shift symbolized by the increasing use of the word ‘comrade’ instead of ‘citizen’ as the favoured mode of address. Given the underdevelopment of class relations in Russia, and the key role played in politics by such non-class groups as soldiers and nationalist movements, this was a remarkable development. After all, the language of class, at least in its Marxist guise, had entered politics only after 1905; yet it had been disseminated through endless strikes, demonstrations, speeches, leaflets, newspapers, and labour organizations. The layer of ‘conscious’ workers, drawn mainly from the ranks of skilled, literate young men, served as the conduit through which ideas of class and socialism passed to the wider workforce. The discourse proved easily assimilable, since it played on a deeply rooted distinction in popular culture between ‘them’, the *verkhi,* those at the top, and ‘us’, the *nizy,* those at the

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| |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | bottom. In 1917 ‘we’ could signify the working class, ‘proletarian youth’, ‘working women’, the ‘toiling people’, or ‘revolutionary democracy’. ‘They’ could signify capitalists, landlords, army generals or, at its most basic, *burzhui* – anyone with education, an overbearing manner, soft hands, or spectacles. The antipathy shown towards such groups as engineers or rural schoolteachers testifies to how indiscriminate the rhetoric of class could become.  The discourse of class served to cement two contending power blocs and to articulate fundamentally opposed sets of values and visions of the social order. It was at the root of the process of political polarization that escalated from late summer. Doubtless the salience of this discourse was linked to the way in which the discourse of nation became appropriated by conservatives. Faced with what they perceived to be processes of elemental revolt and national disintegration, the Kadets appealed to the nation to cast aside class and sectional interest. Yet if the class and nation became sharply counterposed, the discourse of class was in part an attempt to contest the Kadet vision of the nationunder-siege and to redefine the meaning of the nation in terms of the toiling people, playing on the double sense of the Russian word *narod,* which means both ‘common people’ and ‘nation’.  **The fall of the Provisional Government**  Kerensky became prime minister following the July Days, presenting himself as the ‘man of destiny’ summoned to ‘save Russia’. His posturing merely masked his impotence. On 19 July, in a bid to halt the disintegration of the army, he appointed General L. G. Kornilov Supreme Commander-in-Chief. Kornilov agreed to take up the post on condition that there was no interference by soldiers' committees in operational orders and that the death penalty was extended from soldiers at the front – already agreed – to those at the rear. Kerensky hoped to use the reactionary general to bolster his image as a strong man and restore the frayed ties with the Kadets, many of whom were openly talking about | |

the need for a military dictatorship to save Russia from ‘anarchy’. Kerensky and Kornilov agreed on the need to establish ‘firm government’ – code for suppressing the Bolsheviks – and each hoped to use the other to achieve his more particular ends. On 26 August, however, Kerensky lashed out at Kornilov after he received what seemed to be an ultimatum demanding that military and civil authority be placed in the hands of a supreme commander. Accusing Kornilov of conspiring to overthrow the government – and historians dispute as to whether he actually was – he sent a telegram relieving him of his duties. When Kornilov ignored the telegram and ordered troops to advance on Petrograd, he appears to have moved into open rebellion. His attempted coup, however, was poorly planned and the clandestine

counter-revolutionary organizations that had looked to him as their saviour failed to respond. In a humiliating bid to save his government, Kerensky was forced to turn to the very soviets he had been planning to bring to heel, since they alone could prevent Kornilov's troops reaching the capital.

Kornilov's rebellion dramatically demonstrated the danger posed by the ‘counter-revolution’ and starkly underlined the feebleness of the Kerensky regime. No one, however, could have predicted that its immediate consequence would be to allow the Bolsheviks to stage a dramatic recovery, following their defeat in the July Days. On 31 August the Petrograd Soviet passed the Bolshevik resolution ‘On Power’, and the Moscow soviets followed on 5 September. In the first half of that month, 80 soviets in large and medium towns backed the call for a transfer of power to the soviets, although no one was entirely sure what the slogan ‘All Power to the Soviets’ – which belonged just as much to anarchists, Left SRs, and Menshevik Internationalists as to the Bolsheviks – actually meant. Whilst in hiding Lenin had written his most utopian work, *State and Revolution,* outlining his vision of a ‘commune state’ in which the three pillars of the bourgeois state (the police, standing army, and the bureaucracy) would be smashed and in which parliamentary democracy would be replaced by direct democracy based on the soviets. It is unlikely that many, even in the Bolshevik party, understood the slogan in this way. For most workers it meant a break with the coalition with the ‘bourgeoisie’, represented by the Provisional Government, and the formation of an all-socialist government representing all parties in the Soviet CEC.

The Bolshevik slogans of ‘Bread, Peace, and Land’ and ‘All Power to the Soviets’ were now taken up with alacrity. The party's consistent opposition to the government of ‘capitalists and landowners’, its rejection of the ‘imperialist’ war, and its calls for land to the peasants, power to the soviets, and workers' control seemed to hundreds of thousands of workers and soldiers to offer a way forward. Seeing this

happen from his hiding-place in Finland, Lenin became convinced that nationally as well as internationally the time was now ripe for the Bolsheviks to seize power in the name of the soviets. He blitzed the Central Committee with demands that it prepare an insurrection, even threatening to resign on 29 September. ‘History will not forgive us if this opportunity to take power is missed.’ The majority of the leadership was unenthusiastic, believing that it would be better to allow power to pass democratically to the soviets by waiting for the Second Congress of Soviets, scheduled to open on 20 October. Lenin returned in secret to Petrograd and on 10 October persuaded the Central Committee to commit itself to the overthrow of the Provisional Government. Significantly, no timetable was set. Zinoviev and Kamenev were bitterly opposed to the decision, believing that the conditions for socialist revolution did not yet exist and that an insurrection was likely to be crushed. Lenin, however, argued that only by seizing power would popular support for a soviet government be consolidated. As late as 16 October, the mood in the party was against an insurrection and the decision of Zinoviev and Kamenev to make public their opposition drove Lenin to paroxysms of fury. It fell to Trotsky to make the practical preparations, which he did, not by following Lenin's scheme to launch an offensive against the capital by sailors and soldiers of the northern front, but by associating the insurrection with the defence of the Petrograd garrison and the Soviet.

On 6 October the government announced that half the garrison were to be moved out of the city to defend it against the sweeping German advance. Interpreting this as an attempt to rid the capital of its most revolutionary elements, the Soviet on 9 October created the embryo of a Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC) to resist the transfer. This was the organization that Trotsky used to unseat the government. There would have been no possibility of obeying Lenin's injunction to seize power prior to the Second Congress had the moderate socialists on the Soviet CEC not postponed its opening from 20 to 25 October, evidently to allow Kerensky time to prepare a pre-emptive strike against

the Bolsheviks. On 20 October when the government ordered the transfer of troops to commence, the MRC ordered units not to move without its permission. On the night of 23–4 October Kerensky gave Trotsky the pretext he was looking for when he ordered the Bolshevik printing press to be shut down, as a prelude to moving against the MRC. On 24 October military units, backed by armed bands of workers, known as Red Guards, took control of bridges, railway stations, and other strategic points. Kerensky fled, unable to muster troops to resist the insurgents. By the morning of 25 October, only the Winter Palace, the headquarters of the government, remained to be taken. That afternoon Lenin appeared for the first time in public since July, proclaiming to the Petrograd Soviet that the Provisional Government

had been overthrown. ‘In Russia we must now set about building a proletarian socialist state.’ At 10.40 p.m. the Second Congress of Soviets finally opened against the sound of distant artillery bombardment of the Winter Palace. The Mensheviks and SRs denounced the insurrection as a provocation to civil war and demonstratively walked out, Trotsky's taunt echoing in their ears: ‘You are miserable bankrupts; your role is played out. Go where you ought to be: into the dustbin of history.’

The seizure of power is often presented as a conspiratorial coup against a democratic government. It had all the elements of a coup – albeit one much advertised in the press – except for the fact that a coup implies the seizure of a functioning state machine. Arguably, Russia had not had this since February. The reasons for the failure are not hard to pinpoint. Lacking legitimacy from the first, the Provisional Government relied on the moderate socialists in the Petrograd Soviet to make its writ felt. From the summer it was engulfed by a concatenation of crises – at the front, in the countryside, in industry, and in the non-Russian periphery. Few governments could have coped with such a situation, and certainly not without an army to rely on.

Many historians argue that democratic government was simply a nonstarter in Russia in 1917. The analysis above leans to that conclusion but we should note that in spring there was widespread enthusiasm for ‘democracy’. Workers, soldiers, and peasants showed enthusiasm for a constitution, a republic, and civil rights; yet such matters were always secondary to the solution of their pressing socio-economic problems. It was the soviets and the factory committees, the institutions dedicated to promoting the social revolution, that were perceived as truly democratic. In other words, from the first, a heavily ‘socialized’ conception of democracy vied with a liberal notion of democracy tied to the defence of private property. The fact that the bases for a democratic regime were slender does not mean that they were non-existent, not at least if we think in terms of a regime that was socialist rather than liberal in complexion. If the Petrograd Soviet, having taken power in March,

had hastened to summon the Constituent Assembly and to tackle the land question, the SRs and Mensheviks might have been able to consolidate a parliamentary regime. Following the Kornilov rebellion, a majority of moderate socialists finally came round to the view that the coalition with the ‘bourgeoisie’ had to end, and took up demands for a speedy end to the war, the transfer of land to the land committees, and the immediate summoning of the Constituent Assembly. If these demands had been raised in the spring it might have made all the difference. But then again, there were many in the SR party whose instincts were little different from those of Kerensky and who would have insisted on continuing the war, at least pending an international peace conference (something the Allies had no intention of agreeing to). And therein lay the rub. For the fate of democracy in 1917 was ultimately sealed by the decision to continue the war. It was the war that focused the otherwise disparate grievances of the people. It was war that exacerbated the deep polarization in society to a murderous extent. In 1902 Karl Kautsky, the leader of the German Social Democrats, had warned:

Revolution which arises from war is a sign of the weakness of the revolutionary class, and often the cause of further weakness, because of the sacrifice it brings with it, and because of the moral and intellectual degradation to which war gives rise.

In the last analysis, it was the war that made the Bolshevik seizure of power irresistible.

**Civil war and the foundation  
of the Bolshevik regime**

The October seizure of power generated an exhilarating sense that a new world was in the offing where justice and equality would triumph over arbitrariness and exploitation, where the power of nature would be harnessed to ensure plenty for all. In the eyes of most workers and soldiers, as well as many peasants, a soviet government signalled land and freedom, the triumph of equality and justice, vengeance on the old privileged classes, and rule by the toilers. The Bolsheviks deprecated the charge that they were utopians, insisting that the seizure of power was in step with the logic of capitalist development. Yet like revolutionaries everywhere they could not have endured without an idealized vision of the future society. According to the constitution of July 1918, the aim was nothing less than the:

abolition of all exploitation of man by man, the complete elimination of the division of society into classes, the ruthless suppression of the exploiters, the establishment of a socialist organization of society, and the victory of socialism in all countries.

Determined to project their radical difference from the temporizing Provisional Government, they issued no fewer than 116 different decrees up to 1 January 1918 – on the burning questions of peace, land, and workers' control, and on such varied matters as divorce, selfdetermination for the Armenians in Turkey, and reform of the alphabet.

n spite of their utopianism, the Bolsheviks were initially circumspect as to whether socialism was immediately on the cards, since they were well aware that none of the material preconditions for socialism existed in this torn and backward country. They hoped that revolution would break out in the more developed countries of Europe, by no means an idle hope given the devastation wrought by the First World War. In the course of 1918 the war did indeed bring about the demise of the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman empires, and the Bolsheviks were particularly excited by the prospect of a revolution in Germany, since it had a large industrial base and well-organized working class. A. A. Ioffe, Soviet representative in Berlin, spent over a million marks attempting to promote a Bolshevik-style revolution that would come to the assistance of Soviet Russia. But although the Kaiser was overthrown, following the armistice in November 1918, and although German soldiers and workers formed soviets, most of them came to the conclusion that the short-term benefits of reform outweighed the costs of revolution. Right up to 1923, however, Europe continued to be profoundly unsettled and Bolshevik hopes were regularly raised by uprisings in Germany, Italy, and the former Habsburg empire.

On 26 October 1917 the Soviet government called on the belligerent powers to begin peace negotiations on the basis of no annexations or indemnities and self-determination for national minorities. They also published the secret treaties of the Allies to expose the ‘filthy machinations of imperialist diplomacy’. Not surprisingly, the Entente spurned the Peace Decree, leaving the Bolsheviks little option but to make a separate peace with Germany. The terms proposed by Germany were tough and the majority of the Central Committee refused to accept them. On 18 February 1918 the German High Command sent 700,000 troops into Russian territory meeting virtually no resistance. On 23 February they proffered terms that were even more draconian. At the Central Committee meeting that evening, Lenin insisted that the terms be accepted, gaining seven votes; Trotsky, who favoured doing nothing, gained four votes; and the left, who favoured a revolutionary

war against Germany, gained four votes. The peace treaty was duly signed at Brest-Litovsk on 3 March 1918. It was massively punitive, excising from the former empire the Baltic provinces and a large part of Belorussia and Ukraine, depriving Russia of access to one-third of the former empire's agricultural land and railways, virtually all its oil and cotton, and three-quarters of its coal and iron.

We must organize our lives according to new labour and socialist principles whereby exploitation by landlords and capitalists, division between masters and slaves no longer exists; whereby only labour and equality reign, whereby all rights, benefits, and wealth belong exclusively to the toilers. The strengthening of these new labour principles demands acceptance and implementation of emergency economic and other measures by the toiling people, starting with the village, then the market town, the township, county, province, region, and ending with the all-Russian centre. It demands the creation of a single toilers' government to guarantee speedily the gains of the toilers.

Declaration of the Perm county soviet of peasant and worker deputies, 14 March 1918

The other major decree issued by the Bolsheviks was that on land, which legitimized the spontaneous seizure of lands owned by the landed gentry, church, and crown and their transfer into peasant hands. Significantly, it did not embody the party's policy of nationalization – taking land into state ownership – but the SR policy of socialization: ‘land passes into the use of the entire toiling people’. This left communes free to decide how they would apportion land. It was a hugely popular measure. In the central black-earth provinces three quarters of landowners' land was confiscated between November 1917 and January 1918. How much better off peasants were as a result, is hard to say, since there was no uniformity in the amount of land peasants

received even within a single township, not to speak of the many regions where there were no gentry estates to redistribute. Nationwide the average allotment expanded by about an acre, but this masks substantial variation. Slightly over a half of all communes received no additional land, and since two-thirds of the land confiscated was already farmed by peasants, the amount of new land that passed into the hands of the peasants only represented just over a fifth of the entire cultivated area. In addition, however, the situation of the peasants was improved by the abolition of rents and loan repayments. Overall, the principal result of the land redistribution was to reduce the extent of social differentiation among the peasantry, reducing the number of wealthy and very poor households and strengthening the ranks of the middling smallholders. Of great concern to the government was the fact that in Russia and Ukraine the most commercialized and technically sophisticated estates and farms were broken up, thereby exacerbating the already lamentable productivity of agriculture.

The widespread expectation was that the Bolshevik seizure of power would lead to the establishment of a government representing all the parties in the Soviet CEC, pending the convening of a Constituent Assembly. On 26 October 1917, however, Lenin formed a Council of People's Commissars, known as Sovnarkom, all 15 members of which were Bolsheviks. Talks to form a coalition got underway, but were scuttled by the intransigence of hard-liners on all sides. Five Bolsheviks promptly resigned from Sovnarkom on the grounds that ‘we consider a purely Bolshevik government has no choice but to maintain itself by political terror.’ On 10 December, however, the Left SRs, who had now finally split from the main party, agreed to accept seven posts in the government on condition that Sovnarkom became accountable to the CEC. It was they who helped craft the law on land redistribution and engineered the fusion of the All-Russian Soviet of Peasant Deputies, whose SR-dominated executive had backed military resistance to the Bolsheviks, with the CEC.

Prior to October the Bolsheviks had made much political capital out of the decision by the Provisional Government to postpone elections to the Constituent Assembly from September to November, since the Constituent Assembly symbolized the people's power at the heart of the revolution. Having seized power, however, it was by no means clear that the Bolsheviks would get a majority in the Assembly. Lenin believed that soviet power, being based on direct election by the toilers, was superior to parliamentary democracy, since parliaments merely served to camouflage control of the state machine by the capitalist class. The Bolsheviks nevertheless decided that the elections should go ahead. According to the latest research, 48.4 million valid votes were cast, of which the SRs gained 19.1 million, the Bolsheviks 10.9 million, the Kadets 2.2 million, and the Mensheviks 1.5 million. The non-Russian socialist parties – mostly sympathetic to the SRs – received over 7 million, including two-thirds of votes in Ukraine. The SRs were thus the clear winners, their vote concentrated in the countryside. The Bolsheviks received the majority of worker votes, together with 42% of the 5.5 million soldiers' votes, but it was clear that they could not hope to have a majority in the Assembly. This vote, incidentally, represented the peak of popular support for the party. Hereafter they lost support as soldiers returned to their villages and as worker disaffection grew.

The Constituent Assembly opened in dispiriting circumstances on 5 January, shortly after pro-assembly demonstrators had been gunned down by Red Guards. The Bolsheviks insisted that the delegates accept soviet power as a *fait accompli,* but the delegates chose to discuss the agenda proposed by the SRs, making Chernov the chair of the Assembly. After a single session, Bolshevik soldiers shut the Assembly down. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that a deal could have been struck. Some 85% of the delegates were socialists – the 200 SR delegates had spent a total of 1,000 years in prison and hard labour – and on the crucial issues of peace and land, the SRs had shifted closer to the Bolshevik position. But the delegates were not prepared to give way on what was for the Bolsheviks the crucial issue: the abandonment of

parliamentary democracy in favour of a ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, based on the soviets. By closing the Constituent Assembly the Bolsheviks signalled that they were ready to wage war in defence of their regime not only against the exploiting classes, but against the socialist camp. The dissolution doomed the chances of democracy in Russia for 70 years; for that the Bolsheviks bear the largest share of the blame. Yet the prospects for a democratic socialist regime had by this stage become extremely slender. It is true that some 70% of the peasants voted in the Assembly elections – including more women than men – but they did so less out of enthusiasm for democratic politics than out of a desire to see the Assembly legalize their title to the land. Once it became clear that they had no reason to fear on that score, they acquiesced in the Assembly's dissolution, testifying to the thinness of a culture of democracy and law.

Soviet power was established with surprising ease – a reflection of the popularity of the idea of devolving power to the toilers. Bolshevik support was strongest in towns and regions with a relatively homogeneous working class, such as in the Central Industrial Region or the mining settlements of the Urals. In less industrial cities, such as Moscow and those along the Volga, the Bolsheviks often relied on the local garrison to declare soviet power; and in the capitals of the predominantly agrarian provinces and in smaller towns the Bolsheviks had difficulty ousting the SRs and Mensheviks from positions of control in the soviets. In Siberia the revolution was carried along the TransSiberian railway and soviet power was declared everywhere by the beginning of 1918: support for the Bolsheviks was strong, in spite of the fact that workers and poor peasants, normally their strongest supporters, were few. In the countryside, peasant reactions were initially mixed. In the middle-Volga province of Saratov in November, 19 townships were favourable to soviet power, two were wavering, eight were unfriendly, and eight downright hostile. By February, however, 86% of townships had created soviets as an alternative to the zemstvos that were generally under SR control. In the central black-earth belt,

progress was somewhat slower, with 83% of townships creating soviets between January and March. These local soviets believed they had complete control of their localities and ignored decrees of the centre with impunity. G. I. Petrovsky, Commissar of Internal Affairs, complained: ‘They prefer their local interests to state interests, continuing to confiscate fuel, timber, designated for railways and factories.’

As early as spring 1918 there was a backlash against the Bolsheviks in many soviets in provincial towns. This was sometimes due, as in Kaluga or Briansk, to the demobilization of the local garrison and sometimes, as in Tver' or Iaroslavl', to the rapid growth of unemployment and the deterioration of the food supply. The arbitrary way in which the Bolsheviks dealt with opposition from soviets – manipulating their structure or closing down the more recalcitrant ones – added to their unpopularity. Yet the revival in the fortunes of the Mensheviks and the SRs should not be exaggerated. New elections to the Moscow Soviet from 28 March to 10 April, although marred by malpractice, gave them only a quarter of the vote. And even where their record was more impressive, the division between the two parties meant they were seldom able to mount an effective challenge to the Bolsheviks. Sometimes, moreover, the challenge came from the left, as in Samara where SR Maximalists declared a commune and ejected Red Guards. On 15 June, discarding the pretence that the soviets were multi-party bodies, the Bolsheviks expelled Mensheviks and SRs from the CEC. This proved to be a decisive step in the subordination of the CEC to Sovnarkom. On 29 May a party circular spelt out the logic of the situation: ‘Our party stands at the head of soviet power. Decrees and measures of soviet power emanate from our party.’

**Civil war**

The years between 1918 and 1922 witnessed a level of strife and anarchy unparalleled since the ‘Time of Troubles’ of 1605–13, when struggles between pretenders to the throne brought Russia to a state of chaos.

The civil war brutalized social life to an unimaginable degree, yet as an epic struggle between the new and old worlds it inspired idealism and heroism among the dedicated minorities who supported the Red and White causes. The young Bolshevik, V. Poliansky, recalled:

We all lived in an atmosphere of revolutionary romanticism, tired, exhausted, but joyful, festive, our hair uncut, unwashed, unshaven, but bright and clear in heart and mind.

Yet the reality was that Russia succumbed to an economic and social cataclysm. The population on Soviet territory fell by 12.7 million between 1917 and early 1922, only partly due to civil war as such. The losses of Soviet armed forces ranged from 1,150,000 to 1,250,000; and when the losses of Whites, partisans and nationalist forces are included, war-related losses rise to between 2.5 million and 3.3 million. Far more perished as a result of disease – between 1917 and 1920 over 2 million died of typhus, typhoid fever, smallpox, and dysentery – causing Lenin to warn that, ‘either the louse will defeat socialism or socialism will defeat the louse.’ Finally, and most hideously, between 1921 and 1922 as many as 6 million died of starvation and disease in a famine that devastated the Volga region and Ukraine. Not without reason did the novelist Boris Pasternak conclude: ‘In our days even the air smells of death.’ Meanwhile the brutalization that had begun with the First World War continued apace. Large quantities of weapons were now in the hands of ordinary people and civil authority was too weak to stanch the flow of violence. After his forces swept the Reds from the northern Caucasus in January 1919, General P. N. Wrangel recollected:

On the outskirts of one of the Cossack settlements we met five young Cossacks with rifles … ‘Where are you going, lads?’ ‘We're going to beat up some Bolsheviks. There are a lot of them hiding in the reeds. Yesterday I killed seven.’ This was said by a boy about 12 years old. During the whole of the intestinal conflict I never felt as sharply as I did at that moment the utter horror of fratricidal war.

he civil war was dominated by the conflict between the Bolsheviks and the conservative nationalist officers who formed the various White armies, notably the Volunteer Army of General A. I. Denikin, the Siberian forces of Admiral A. V. Kolchak, and the Northwestern Army of General N. N. Iudenich. Yet the civil war was more than a straight struggle between Reds and Whites. Initially, the so-called ‘democratic counterrevolution’, led by the SRs, posed at least as great a threat to Bolshevik rule. More crucially, the struggle between Reds and Whites was played out in a context in which the Russian empire was disintegrating, and nationalist movements in Ukraine in 1918, in Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Finland in 1919, and in Poland, Azerbaijan, and Armenia in 1920, made things more complicated for Reds and Whites alike. Furthermore, the civil war had international ramifications, initially in relation to the outcome of the First World War, later in relation to the carving out of post-war spheres of influence. The Allies intervened on the side of the Whites and this was an important, if not ultimately decisive factor in the conflict. Finally, the conflict between Reds and Whites became embroiled with powerful partisan movements, notably the Revolutionary Insurgent Army of Ukraine led by the anarchist N. Makhno, guerrilla actions by deserters, and innumerable peasant uprisings.

It is sensible to see the civil war building up gradually, beginning as early as the Kornilov movement and significantly escalating after the Bolshevik seizure of power. Soviet forces invaded independent Ukraine in December 1917 and by February had succeeded in forcing the nascent Volunteer Army, which struggled to establish a base among the Cossacks of the Don and Kuban regions, to retreat. In these early skirmishes, the Red Guards, Latvian riflemen, and other soviet forces proved to be an eager but ill-disciplined force; so it fell to Trotsky, as Commissar of War, to build a conventional army. In this he faced bitter resistance from those who believed that the only defence force appropriate to a socialist society was a citizens' militia. When only 360,000 men volunteered for the new Red Army, Trotsky on 29 May

1918 reinstated conscription. Vigorous measures were taken to enforce discipline among the largely peasant conscripts, including summary execution and the decimation of units. His most contentious decision was to put former tsarist officers – ‘military specialists’ – in operational command subject to the oversight of political-military commissars. To deter them from treason or desertion – few having much sympathy with the Red cause – their families were held hostage for their good behaviour. Trotsky proved to be an inspirational figure as he toured the front in his famous headquarters train; but he was not infallible as a military commander and his authoritarian methods alienated many. This led to the formation of a Military Opposition, of which Stalin was a supporter, that opposed the ruthless centralization of the Red Army at the Eighth Party Congress in March 1919.

An undreamed-of opportunity for the ‘democratic counter-revolution’ presented itself in May 1918 when the Czech Legion, a body of 38,000 men recruited by the tsarist government from Austro-Hungarian prisoners-of-war, revolted against the Bolsheviks. From this time on, one may speak of full-scale civil war, since armies now fought along clearly defined fronts. Within a few months, the Legion seized control of a vast area east of the Volga and helped the SRs to set up governments committed to overthrowing the Bolsheviks, restoring the Constituent Assembly, and resuming war with Germany. The revolt threw the Bolsheviks into panic. Secret orders were given by Lenin to execute the imperial family in Ekaterinburg lest they be liberated by the insurgents. In fact the SRs proved unable to translate the electoral support they had received in the Constituent Assembly into solid political support and, crucially, into forging a reliable army. Where they remained respectful of democracy and law they were ineffective; where they sought to be firm, they slid into habits not very different from those of the Reds and Whites. Having gone to considerable lengths to secure the cooperation of conservative military men, they ended up in hock to them, compromising what were for the peasants the most important gains of the revolution: land and the devolution of power to the localities. The

fate of SR attempts to create a ‘third way’ between the dictatorships of right and left was sealed on 18 November 1918 when Cossack officers arrested the SR members of the Omsk Directory and proclaimed Admiral Kolchak ‘Supreme Ruler’.

Henceforward the civil war resolved into a conflict between Reds and Whites. The Whites stood for ‘Russia, One and Indivisible’, the restoration of state-mindedness, law and order, and the values of Orthodox Christianity. They strove to redeem the profaned honour of Russia's armed forces and presented themselves as being ‘above class’ and ‘above party’. In fact, they were not a class movement in any strict sense, since they were slow to develop programmes that could have assisted landowners and industrialists to regain their property and power. So far as the political regime for which they were struggling was concerned, there was little unanimity concerning the shape it should take. Some such as General Wrangel of the Volunteer Army were committed monarchists; but most favoured some type of military dictatorship, possibly paving the way for a new Constituent Assembly. In an effort to keep political differences at bay, the Whites advanced the principle of ‘non-predetermination’, i.e. the postponement of all policy-making until the war was over. What kept them united in the meantime was little more than detestation of the Bolsheviks and outrage at the ‘German-Jewish’ conspiracy inflicted on the Russian people.

After a gruelling conflict, it was clear by spring 1920 that it was only a matter of time before the Reds triumphed. Historians differ in their assessment as to why the Reds won: some emphasize the weakness of the Whites; others insist that the Reds had positive advantages, but differ as to whether these were exclusively military in nature or political as well as military. If one compares the armies of the Reds and Whites, it becomes clear that the Reds had certain military advantages. Their army was larger: by autumn 1920 it had grown to over 5 million – although there were never more than half-a-million troops in the front

line – compared with a combined total of 2 million White troops by spring 1920. Moreover, although the quality of both armies was evenly matched – both, for example, suffered from massive levels of desertion – the Reds had the edge so far as leadership was concerned. The Volunteer Army was formed around a core of 4,000 experienced officers; but this ceased to be an advantage once the Reds compelled ‘military specialists’ to enlist; and over time, the Reds proved able to nurture officers of talent such as V. K. Bliukher and M. N. Tukhachevsky. In addition, the Whites were riven by personal animosity, principally between Denikin and Kolchak and Denikin and Wrangel; the conflict between Trotsky and Stalin proved less damaging since the Bolsheviks had a binding ideology and a recognized leader. Finally, the Bolsheviks were clearly superior in the organizational sphere. The Red Army had a unified centre of command in the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic, and was supported by such institutions as the Defence

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|  | Council, which fused the civilian and defence sectors, the Cheka, and an underground party network in White-occupied areas.  Perhaps the greatest advantage enjoyed by the Reds was strategic: their possession of a centrally located and compact territory. This meant that they could send forces from one front to another without great difficulty since railways radiated outwards from Moscow. By contrast, the Whites were strung out along the periphery of European Russia. The Don base of the Volunteer Army was nearly 1,000 kilometres from Moscow; Kolchak's base in Omsk was almost 3,000 kilometres from Petrograd. Any advance into the heartland of soviet power created a problem of long supply lines and communication difficulties. Moreover, the possession by the Reds of the core territory, where the majority of the population and resources were concentrated, gave them control of key industrial centres as well the stocks of the tsarist army. The Whites, by contrast, had control of only secondary centres of the defence industry in the Donbas and Urals, although they were better supplied with coal. As against that, they had an abundance of food, especially in Siberia and the Kuban region, so soldiers in the White armies were generally better fed than their Red counterparts, whose ration norm of 410 grams of bread per day was lower than in the tsarist army.  Some see the military advantages of the Reds as overwhelming, but that is to make too much of hindsight. A military victory for the Whites was by no means an impossibility: if Kolchak and Denikin had advanced on Moscow simultaneously in 1919, rather than five months apart, or if Kolchak had struck a deal with the Finnish general Mannerheim (both of which were on the cards), the Red Army might well have gone under.  If military and strategic factors are paramount in explaining the White defeat, socio-political factors cannot be ignored. By 1919 all the White administrations recognized that they could not simply shelve the thorny issues of land reform, national autonomy, labour policy, and local government. The policies they concocted, however, offered too little, |

too late and exposed deep division in White ranks. First, with regard to the land, all White administrations accepted that there could be no return to the status quo ante, yet there were enough cases of officers returning former landowners to their estates to fix in peasant minds the notion that a White victory would bring about the return of the landlords. Whenever the Whites threatened, therefore, peasants swung behind the Reds. Second, the Whites had to deal with non-Russian nationalities; yet their hatred of what Denikin called the ‘sweet poisonous dreams of independence’ prevented them from making serious concessions. They would not recognize the independence of Finland and the Baltic states; they would not negotiate with J. Pilsudski, President of Poland from November 1918; they would not recognize a ‘separatist’ Ukrainian state. By contrast, the Bolsheviks, however much they alienated nationalists at times, were willing to grant a measure of self-government. Finally, despite trumpeting their devotion to the Russian people, the Whites failed to forge a concept of the nation with which peasants and workers could identify. With the Church on their side, they might have tried to play on the Orthodox faith of the majority, yet they proved too hidebound by a militaristic and narrowly elitist ethos to adapt to the world of mass politics. Ironically, it was the internationalist Bolsheviks who tapped into patriotic sentiment, exploiting the Whites' dependence on the Allies to portray them as playthings of foreign capital.

By the end of the civil war the Red Army had become the largest institution of state, enjoying absolute priority in the allocation of resources. In the absence of a numerous or politically reliable proletariat, it became by default the principal social base of the regime. Fighting to defend the socialist motherland, living in collective units, subject to political education, the army proved to be the seeding ground for the cadres who came to staff the apparatus of the partystate in the 1920s. It also proved to be the agency through which the revolution was brought to new areas. Instead of socialism being spread through mobilizing workers, the Bolsheviks came to believe that what

N. I. Bukharin called ‘red intervention’ was the best means of furthering socialism. In 1920, without the least embarrassment, the leading Bolshevik, K. B. Radek, could claim: ‘We were always for revolutionary war. The bayonet is an essential necessity for introducing communism.’

**Nationalism and empire**

By October 1917 it looked as though the Russian empire might break up, in the way the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires did, so it was important that the Bolsheviks should have a clear policy on the question of self-determination for the non-Russian peoples. In fact, they were divided on the matter. Lenin was sensitive to the oppression that the non-Russian peoples had experienced under tsarism and believed that they must be given the right to secede from the empire if there was to be any chance of them cooperating with the Russian proletariat in the longer term. The majority did not share his view. In December 1917 the new Commissar of Nationalities, Stalin, expressed the consensus view when he argued that self-determination should be exercised only by the labouring classes, and not by the bourgeoisie. Because they had no firm position, therefore, Bolshevik policy was determined to a large extent by pragmatic considerations.

On 31 December 1917 the Bolsheviks recognized the independence of Finland, something the Provisional Government had been reluctant to do. In the Baltic as a whole, however, they fought movements for national independence since support for soviet power was strong. In Latvia German occupation undermined the soviets and paved the way for a nationalist government. In Estonia, where soviets ran many towns, Bolshevik indifference to nationalist sensitivities, combined with failure to expropriate the German barons, strengthened support for the Maapäev which repelled the Red Army in early 1919, with assistance from Whites, the British, and Finnish volunteers. By 1920 the Bolsheviks were reconciled to the loss of Estonia and Latvia. In Belorussia and   
Lithuania nationalism was weak and the defeat of Germany left a power vacuum which Poles and Reds sought to fill. After the Germans withdrew, the feeble government in Belorussia collapsed, allowing the Reds to take over. In March 1919 they merged Belorussia with Lithuania to form the Litbel soviet republic. The following month, however, Poland occupied Vilnius, the putative capital of independent Lithuania, reinstated landowners, and made Polish the official language. Nationalism was weak in Lithuania, the population being largely peasant and the small urban population Jewish or Polish, yet nationalists rather adeptly exploited the Soviet–Polish war to gain independence albeit within much reduced borders. By the Treaty of Riga, the Bolsheviks recognized the independence of the Baltic states and of a Poland whose eastern border extended well into Belorussian and Ukrainian-majority territory. Signed in March 1921, the treaty reflected the inability of either Russia or Poland to establish their hegemony in the Baltic in the way that Germany once had.

The loss of Ukraine was something the Bolsheviks found much harder to contemplate. No fewer than nine governments came and went in the space of three years, testifying to the inability of nationalists, Whites, or Reds to enforce control. Caught between the Reds and Whites, the intermittent nationalist governments turned for protection first to Germany, then to the Entente, and finally to Poland. Torn by political division, they found themselves increasingly at odds with a peasantry that looked for protection to the guerrilla bands of Makhno and the other *otomany,* or chiefs. The civil war devastated Ukraine but had a paradoxical effect on social identities. Ukrainian peasants turned inwards as centralized power broke down, yet their identification with the Ukrainian nation was strengthened as a result of independent statehood. Twice the Bolsheviks gained control of Ukraine and each time their promise of self-determination proved hollow. Only in 1920 after Moscow cleared Russian chauvinists out of leadership of the Ukrainian Communist Party did the new Soviet administration seriously address aspirations for self-determination. And in a pattern replicated Overall, the civil war strengthened national identities yet deepened divisions within nationalist movements. Most nationalists proved unable politically or militarily to remain neutral in the contest between Reds and Whites and many ended up in hock to Germany, Turkey, Allied interventionists, or Poland. Most lacked solid popular support (there were exceptions, such as Georgia) and most fell prey to damaging conflicts over social and economic policies, especially concerning the land. By the end of the civil war, the Bolsheviks offered nationalists less than many wanted – although it is worth remembering that in 1917 few had aspired to complete national independence – yet far more than was on offer from Whites, the Allies, the Germans, or Turks. At the same time, they exploited the weakness of nationalism to reintegrate the bulk

of the non-Russian territories into the Soviet Union. By 1922 the territory of the Soviet state was only 4% smaller than that of the tsarist empire. Moreover, the logic of this reincorporation was determined by many of the same geopolitical, security, and economic considerations that had governed the expansion of the tsarist state. A colossal territory unbroken by well-defined geographical or ethnic features, the unfavourable location of mineral resources, and above all, competition with rival states encouraged the reconstitution of a centralized quasiimperial state. This did not mean that the Bolsheviks were simply oldstyle imperialists whose commitment to national self-determination was fraudulent. Despite the rampant racism of certain Bolsheviks on the ground, and the fact that the centre was never unequivocally in favour of granting national autonomy, policy in this period was generally animated by internationalism. It is not possible otherwise to explain why so much energy went into forging alliances with national movements or devising political frameworks for self-determination. Prior to 1917 the Bolsheviks had opposed the concept of federalism, preferring ‘regional autonomy’ within a unitary state. Yet, haphazardly, in response to forces that defied their control, they proceeded to restructure the former empire as a federation of soviet republics constituted along ethno-national lines. A form of federalism that gave non-Russian peoples a measure of political autonomy plus broad rights of cultural self-expression seemed to be the best means of reconciling the centrifugal impulses of nationalism with the centralizing impulse of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

**Party dictatorship**

In December 1917 the Cheka was set up to ‘liquidate all attempts and acts of counter-revolution and sabotage’. It quickly turned into one of the most powerful organs of state, involved not only in eliminating counter-revolutionaries – of whom there were not a few – but also in combating speculation, corruption, and crime. By autumn 1918 the Cheka was associated above all with the Red terror. The Bolsheviks

nitially insisted that terror was a legitimate method of defending the dictatorship of the proletariat, but they promised to use it only as a last resort. As early as January 1918, however, Lenin warned: ‘Until we use terror against speculators – shooting them on the spot – nothing will happen,’ prompting the Left SR, I. N. Steinberg, to ask why in that case he should waste his time serving as Commissar of Justice. It was only with the near-fatal attack on Lenin by the anarchist F. Kaplan on 30 August 1918 that terror became elevated to official policy. In Petrograd the leading newspaper shrieked: ‘For the blood of Lenin … let there be floods of blood of the bourgeoisie – more blood, as much as possible.’

My words to you, you bloodthirsty beast. You intruded into the ranks of the revolution and did not allow the Constituent Assembly to meet. You said: ‘Down with prisons, Down with shootings, Down with soldiering. Let wage workers be secure.’ In a word you promised heaps of gold and a heavenly existence. The people felt the revolution, began to breathe easily. We were allowed to meet, to say what we liked, fearing nothing. And then you, Bloodsucker, appeared and took away freedom from the people. Instead of turning prisons into schools, they're full of innocent victims. Instead of forbidding shootings, you've organized a terror and thousands of the people are shot mercilessly every day; you've brought industry to a halt so that workers are starving, the people are without shoes or clothes.

Letter from a Red Army soldier to Lenin, 25 December 1918

Between 1918 and February 1922, it has been estimated that 280,000 were killed by the Cheka and Internal Security Troops, about half in the course of operations to mop up peasant insurgents. This suggests that perhaps 140,000 were executed directly by the Cheka – a bloodcurdling number to be sure, but one that should be seen in the context of the 600,000 British and French troops who were sacrificed on the Somme

in 1916 in order to advance seven miles. The Red terror was both spectacular – designed to strike terror into the hearts of the populace – and ‘bureaucratic’ in character. According to Cheka statistics, 128,010 were arrested in the RSFSR (All-Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic) in 1918–19, of whom 42% were released; of the rest who were tried, nearly 8% were shot and the rest incarcerated or sentenced to hard labour. By contrast, the White terror, which has received far less attention, was usually carried out when officers allowed their men to go on the rampage. In Ukraine at least 100,000 Jews perished at the hands of unruly soldiers of Denikin and the Ukrainian nationalist, S. V. Petliura. In leading Bolshevik circles concern was regularly expressed that the Cheka was out of control; yet periodic attempts to curb it never lasted long, mainly because Lenin refused to accept that institutional checks and balances were necessary to inhibit lawlessness and corruption.

The socialist and anarchist parties proved unable to mount a concerted challenge to the burgeoning one-party dictatorship. After Kolchak's coup in November 1918, the SRs distanced themselves from the policy of overthrowing the regime by force. Most organizations agreed to make the struggle against the Whites their priority, but were unable to agree on how far they should also campaign against the Bolsheviks. At three moments of crisis in 1918–19, the Bolsheviks briefly legalized the SRs, but the tendency of policy was clear. By 1920 the majority of the Central Committee were in jail. Following the peace of Brest-Litovsk, the Left SRs also moved into opposition to the regime. In July 1918, having assassinated the German ambassador, they launched a quixotic uprising in Moscow, designed to force the Bolsheviks to break with ‘opportunism’. This resulted in the party being banned, a ban that was later eased at various times. The Left SRs now succumbed to a bewildering number of splits: by October 1918 their membership had fallen by two-thirds from a peak of nearly 100,000 in June. In Ukraine the Left SRs carried out partisan activity behind Petliura's lines, but disparate groups of ‘activists’ – led by the redoubtable Maria Spiridonova – refused to let up on the struggle to overthrow the

Bolsheviks and to establish a ‘dictatorship of toilers’. By 1920, however, the die-hards were in a minority, most of this battered party rejecting armed struggle against the regime. Splits among the Mensheviks were less damaging, but they too suffered a severe decline in membership from around 150,000 in December 1917 to under 40,000 by late 1918. A few joined the anti-Bolshevik governments in summer 1918, but the centre and left factions – the bulk of the membership – rallied in support of the Red Army, whilst seeking to defend the integrity of the soviets and trade unions. In a few soviets such as that in Tula, and in a few trade unions, such as those of printers and chemical workers, they maintained their dominance in spite of prolonged harassment by the Cheka. By autumn 1921, however, only 4,000 retained their party cards.

The Bolsheviks viewed the opposition parties with contempt, as opportunists at best, counter-revolutionaries at worst. Since they believed that only one party – their own – could represent the proletariat, other socialists and anarchists were by definition representatives of the ‘petty bourgeoisie’. The decision to ban the opposition parties outright, however, was not simply an expression of ideology, since the Bolsheviks made tactical concessions to them at various junctures, even if not of a substantial or lasting kind. The Bolsheviks believed they were fighting to defend an embryonic socialist state from the forces of world imperialism. Those, like the SRs, who reserved the option of taking up arms against them, or those, like Mensheviks, who professed support for the Red Army yet reserved the right to lambast the regime, were giving succour to the enemy. As civil war intensified, Bolshevik attitudes hardened, so that what began as a pragmatic restriction hardened into a determination to be rid of the opposition parties once and for all. Yet if responsibility for the creation of one-party dictatorship lies with the Bolsheviks, that does not acquit the opposition of a measure of responsibility for its own fate. After October the opposition parties faced a scenario for which their ideologies had ill-prepared them and they fell prey to bitter and debilitating splits. They also largely failed to capitalize on the

widespread popular disaffection with the Bolsheviks, evident, for example, in the Left SRs' failure to oppose the deeply unpopular committees of poor peasants. This was in part, then, a failure of political leadership. Yet the opposition parties were caught by the dilemma of all civil wars, which leave little space for third parties. Despite their fury at the government, most workers and peasants identified the struggle of the Reds with defence of the revolution and when the Bolsheviks said that one was either for them or against them, it had a compelling logic.

The massive problems of recruiting, feeding, and transporting the Red Army, of squeezing grain from an unwilling peasantry, and of overcoming parochialism and inertia at the local level created irresistible pressures to centralize decision-making at the apex of the party. Moreover the constant emergencies of war fed the pressure to take instant decisions and to implement them forcefully, with the result that the party came increasingly to operate like an army. By 1919 the Central Committee of what was now known as the Russian Communist Party (bolshevik) had become the centre where all key decisions were made before being passed on to Sovnarkom or the Soviet CEC for

implementation. The Central Committee was dominated by an oligarchy consisting of Lenin, Trotsky, Kamenev, Zinoviev, Stalin, and Bukharin, but there was never any doubt that Lenin was first among equals. His moral authority and his leadership skill, in particular his ability to balance intransigence with compromise, held the oligarchy together. There were no deep factional splits within the Central Committee, although a loose group did resent Trotsky's talent and influence. By 1921 the Committee had doubled in size to cope with the growing volume of business; and since its meetings were relatively infrequent, a Politburo of five, formed in 1919, dealt with the most urgent business. This met at least once a week and quickly became the most powerful decisionmaking body in the party-state. The sudden death from influenza in March 1919 of Ia. M. Sverdlov, the party secretary, a man of indefatigable energy, led to a rapid expansion of the Orgburo and the Secretariat. Given the party's role in directing the different agencies of government, this meant that the responsibility of the Orgburo for assigning personnel gave Stalin, its chair, extensive power.

The life-and-death struggle to preserve the state against internal counter-revolution and foreign intervention, and the relentless necessity to deal with one emergency after another led to a gradual change in the culture of the party. The paramount need to make fast decisions and get things done meant that debate and internal democracy increasingly came to be seen as luxuries. This change in culture was linked at a deeper level to the change in the nature of the party from being a conspiratorial body bent on destroying the old order, to becoming a body seeking to build and manage a state. Gradually, the range of opinion permitted in the party narrowed. By the end of the civil war, it was inconceivable that a Bolshevik should argue – as had been perfectly possible in October 1917 – that other socialist parties should be represented in the soviets or that freedom of the press should extend to ‘bourgeois’ publications. At the same time, as debate in a larger public sphere dried up, owing to the clampdown on the press and the elimination of opposition, so the party itself became the arena in whichpolitical conflict was played out. Factions such as the Democratic Centralists inveighed against the ‘dictatorship of party officialdom’ in the vain hope of reconciling centralized decision-making with rank-andfile participation in party and soviet affairs; and the Workers' Opposition rallied against attempts to reduce the trade unions to impotence. Yet the tendency for expeditious decision-making to squeeze out debate and dissent was inexorable. At the Tenth Party Congress in March 1921, against the distant roar of the Kronstadt cannons, factions were banned, supposedly as a temporary measure. The measure was never revoked.

As the party was transformed into the backbone of the new state, so it began to attract people who once would never have dreamed of becoming revolutionaries. Between the Eighth Congress in March 1919 and the Tenth, the party grew from 313,000 to 730,000, still a tiny proportion of the population. The proportion of worker members fell by about a fifth to 41%, but many of these were in fact former workers who now held positions in the state administration, economic management, or the Red Army. The rest of the membership was more or less equally divided between peasants (mostly soldiers) and whitecollar employees (most of whom worked in the state apparatuses). On the eve of the Tenth Party Congress, L. B. Krasin declared:

The source of the woes and unpleasantness we are experiencing is the fact that the Communist Party consists of 10% convinced idealists who are ready to die for the idea, and 90% hangers-on without consciences, who have joined the party in order to get a position.

Krasin was almost certainly exaggerating, but he articulated a widespread sense that the party was being hijacked by careerists. Indeed, it was precisely at this time that rank-and-file members began to attack the privileges enjoyed by ‘those at the top’. What these amounted to can be seen from the diary entry for 24 November 1919 of the writer Kornei Chukovsky:

Yesterday I was at Gorky's. Zinoviev was there. At the entrance I was amazed to see a magnificent car on the seat of which was carelessly thrown a bear skin. Zinoviev – short and fat – spoke in a hoarse and satiated voice.

Meanwhile as the state acquired ever more functions, its apparatus proliferated. By 1920 no fewer than 5.8 million people worked for the party-state. Many had worked in the same jobs before the revolution and few had much sympathy for the revolution. The army of typists, filing clerks, cashiers, accountants, storekeepers, and drivers had a low level of education, were inefficient, reluctant to take initiative, and imbued with an ethos of red tape and routinism. Officials tended to throw their weight around, whilst deferring to those above them on the bureaucratic ladder, to scramble for petty privilege, and to defend their narrow departmental turf. In the countryside, where there were fewer officials inherited from the tsarist regime, a new breed of ‘soviet’ official arose, many of whom had done service in the Red Army. A report from the Penza provincial Cheka in summer 1920 was typical:

In the countryside we must quench the appetites of those ‘commissars’ who on going into the village consider it their sacred duty to get blind drunk, and then take other pleasures, such as raping women, shooting, and so forth.

In that year the Commissariat of State Control received tens of thousands of complaints about bribery, speculation, embezzlement, drunkenness, and sabotage mainly on the part of officials in the township soviets.

By 1920–1 there was a crisis of morale within the Communist Party. Disaffection at the trend towards authoritarianism, exemplified in the suppression of debate and the Secretariat's riding roughshod over lower-level organizations, merged with disaffection at the careerism and corruption rampant in the party-state in an anguished debate

about the nature and causes of ‘bureaucracy’ in the new order. Both leadership and the Democratic Centralists saw it as stemming from the entry into the party-state of ‘class aliens’ and both agreed that the key to solving the problem lay in the promotion of workers to positions of responsibility. Neither side, however, appreciated that the major cause of ‘bureaucracy’ lay in the massive expansion of the party-state itself. Nor did they appreciate that proletarians promoted into official positions would not necessarily behave differently from those who had once worked for the tsarist administration, since bureaucrats derive motivation from the technical functions they perform. Where leadership and opposition parted company was over the latter's call for greater internal party democracy as a counter to bureaucracy. When the leader of the Democratic Centralists called for the Central Committee to be made more accountable, Lenin retorted:

Soviet socialist democracy is not incompatible with one-person management or dictatorship. A dictator can sometimes express the will of a class, since he will sometimes achieve more alone and thus be more necessary.

It was a position from which he was never to retreat. Since 1917 Lenin had come to believe that centralization of power was imperative if the revolution was to be safeguarded; the most that could be allowed was for the masses to monitor those who ruled on their behalf.

**War Communism**

After October the economy galloped from crisis to near collapse. By 1920–1 industrial output was one-fifth, average labour productivity onethird, and coal production and consumer goods production one-quarter of 1913 levels. Plummeting output, compounded by the Allied blockade and disorganization of the transport system, placed severe constraints on the Bolsheviks' room for manoeuvre. To mobilize the battered forces of industry and agriculture to meet the needs of war, they set in place policies that were retrospectively labelled ‘War Communism’. These policies comprised an extremely centralized system of economic administration; the complete nationalization of industry; a state monopoly on grain and other agricultural products; a ban on private trade and the restriction of monetary-commodity exchange; rationing of key consumer items; and the imposition of military discipline on workers. Historians debate whether these policies originated in the Bolshevik intention to move as rapidly as possible towards communism, or whether they were principally dictated by the exigencies of economic collapse and civil war, rooted in expediency rather than ideology.

The Bolsheviks came to power intent on imposing state regulation on the economy, but uncertain as to how far it could be transformed along socialist lines. The Central Council of Factory Committees pressed for a Supreme Economic Council to regulate the economy and state finances, established on 2 December, together with an ‘active’ form of workers'

control of production as an integral element of this system of economic regulation. The Decree on Workers' Control passed on 14 November – the third most popular of the Bolsheviks' founding decrees after peace and land – was obsolete within weeks as the Bolsheviks decided that the rising tide of economic chaos required that the factory committees be integrated into the more centralized apparatus of the trade unions. Initially, Lenin seems to have thought that socialist measures were on the agenda, since he ratified decrees nationalizing the banks, railways, merchant fleet, and many mines and joint-stock companies. However, during the harsh winter his enthusiasm for nationalization cooled; by March 1918 he was claiming that ‘state capitalism will be our salvation’, by which he meant that most enterprises would remain in private ownership but be subject to regulation by state-run cartels. This proved to be a non-starter, since few capitalists were ready to cooperate with the proletarian state. Moreover, this was precisely the time when pressure for nationalization was intensifying at the grass roots, as factory committees and soviets ‘nationalized’ enterprises whose owners had fled or were suspected of sabotage. Between November 1917 and March 1918, 836 enterprises were ‘nationalized’ from below in this way. Unable to resist this momentum, and aware that the Treaty of BrestLitovsk made it liable to pay compensation to German nationals owning shares in private Russian companies, the government on 28 June moved decisively towards full-scale nationalization, taking some 2,000 jointstock companies into state ownership. Henceforth the drive to nationalize proved unstoppable, fuelled mainly by the conviction that it was evidence of progress towards socialism.

After October 1917 the lamentable level of industrial productivity plunged still further as a result of wear-and-tear on machinery, supply problems and the fall in labour intensity, which was itself due to poor diet, absenteeism (brought on by the search for food and the necessity of working on the side) and, not least, by the breakdown in labour discipline. From early 1918, the trade unions struggled to combat falling productivity by restoring the piece-rate which linked wages to output.

As part of his more sober evaluation of revolutionary prospects, Lenin now pronounced that the key task facing the Russian worker was to ‘learn how to work’. From spring 1918, he campaigned for a single individual to be put in charge of each enterprise, a demand that struck at the heart of workers' self-management. Throughout 1919 he faced stiff resistance from those who defended the existing system of collegial management, whereby nationalized enterprises were run by boards comprising one-third workers plus representatives of technical staff, trade unions, and state economic organs. But Lenin was never one to give up. By 1920, 82% of enterprises were under one-person management. At the same time, he campaigned for the authority of technical specialists to be restored and for them to receive salaries commensurate with their expertise, arguing that the latter was more important than ‘zeal’, ‘human qualities’, or ‘saintliness’. This, too, proved deeply unpopular. As one worker told the Ninth Party Conference in September 1920: ‘I'll go to my grave hating*spetsy* [technical specialists] …. We have to hold them in a grip of iron, the way they used to hold us.’ By the end of the civil war, not much was left of the democratic forms of industrial administration promoted by the factory committees in 1917, but the government argued that this did not matter since industry had passed into the ownership of a workers' state.

During the civil war the autonomy of trade unions was also drastically curtailed. As early as January 1918 the First Trade-Union Congress rejected Menshevik demands that the unions remain ‘independent’, contending that in a workers' state their chief function was to ‘organize production and restore the battered productive forces of the country’. From 1919, however, efforts to place workers under military discipline led to much friction between unions and government. This culminated in August 1920 in Trotsky's peremptory replacement of the elected boards of the railway and water-transport unions with a Central Committee for Transport that combined the functions of commissariat, political organ, and trade union. This sparked a fierce debate in which

Trotsky and Bukharin called for the complete absorption of the trade unions into the state; M. P. Tomsky, on behalf of the trade unions, defended a degree of trade-union autonomy but concurred that their principal task was to oversee the implementation of economic policy; and the Workers' Opposition urged that the unions be given complete responsibility for running the economy. The Tenth Party Congress in March 1921 castigated the latter view as an ‘anarcho-syndicalist deviation’ and gave overwhelming backing to a compromise resolution from Lenin that backed away from the idea of rapid ‘statization’ of the trade unions, insisting that they still had a residual function of defending workers' interests and stressing their role as ‘schools of communism’.

Many of the same pressures that led to the centralization of decisionmaking within the party also led to hyper-centralization of the economic organs. In response to scarcity and fragmentation of power at the local level, where often a multiplicity of inexperienced soviets, economic councils, trade unions, and factory committees vied to commandeer resources and resolve local problems, the Supreme Council of the Economy struggled to impose central coordination. It was responsible chiefly for administering and financing industry, but it also intervened in the procurement and distribution of supplies, and even in transportation, food, and labour allocation. It was hardly a watchword for efficiency, being organized according to a dual principle. Boards, each with its own vertical hierarchy, presided over each branch of industry but competed with a geographically organized hierarchy of county- and province-level economic councils. In practice, this meant that dozens of overlapping and autonomous hierarchies functioned with few if any horizontal links to the relevant government commissariats. Trotsky described how in the Urals one province ate oats, while another fed wheat to horses; yet nothing could be done without the consent of the food commissariat in Moscow. On 30 November 1918 the whole system was capped by a Defence Council, vested with extraordinary powers to mobilize material and human

resources for the Red Army and to coordinate the war effort at the front and in the rear. The most that can be said is that the system succeeded in targeting scarce supplies of materials, fuel, and manufactures on the Red Army. The drawbacks were that it was wasteful and hugely bureaucratic – the ratio of white-collar employees to workers in nationalized industries rising from one in ten in 1918 to one in seven in 1920.

The most critical problem facing the Bolshevik government in these years was that of food supply. To the existing reluctance of peasants to market grain were added new problems. First, the break-up of the landowners' estates strengthened subsistence farming at the expense of cash crops. Second, the loss of Ukraine deprived the Bolsheviks of a region that had produced 35% of marketed grain, and the grain area at its disposal was further cut when war came to many Volga provinces and to Siberia. Meanwhile the snarl-up on the railways, which was due to fuel shortages, the deterioration of track and rolling stock, and the devolution of control to local railway unions, meant that much of the food that was procured vanished or rotted before it reached the centres of consumption. Finally, the attempt to regulate grain supply was undermined by the boom in profiteering. The winter of 1917–18 was exceptionally severe: by early 1918 the bread ration in Petrograd was down at times to as little as 50 grams a day. In addition to the desperate efforts of workers' organizations to lay their hands on grain, profiteering by petty traders flourished. In Ivanovo-Voznesensk province so-called ‘baggers’ imported about 3 million puds of grain (one pud being equal to 16.5 kilograms) between 1 August 1917 and 1 January 1918, two-and-a-half times the amount procured by food authorities. Buying up grain in grain-surplus provinces for 10–12 rubles a pud, they sold it for 50–70 rubles, at a time when the fixed price was still only 3–4 rubles.

In the first months the government hoped desperately that by boosting production of goods such as fabrics, salt, sugar, and kerosene, it would

be able to induce the peasants to sell their grain. But the persisting shortage of consumer goods, together with spiralling inflation, nullified the policy. In Siberia it is reckoned that in the first half of 1918, 12 million puds of grain were requisitioned, but 25 million were converted into moonshine. Knowing that there was still plenty of grain available, on 14 May the Bolsheviks announced a ‘food dictatorship’ whereby all surpluses above a fixed consumption norm would be subject to confiscation. In minatory fashion the decree warned that ‘enemies of the people’ found to be concealing surpluses would be jailed for not less than ten years. In theory, peasants were still to be recompensed – 25% of the value of requisitions would be in the form of goods, the rest in money or credits – but according to the most generous estimate, only about half the grain requisitioned in 1919 was compensated for, and in 1920 only around 20%. Some indication of what the policy meant in practice can be gleaned from the fact that in 1918, 7,309 members of food detachments, most of them workers, were murdered as they tried to seize surpluses.

The Bolsheviks were convinced that it was ‘kulaks’, or wealthy peasants, who were sabotaging grain procurement, so the food dictatorship was linked to a ‘war on the rural bourgeoisie’. Committees of the rural poor (kombedy) were created in the hope that poor peasants could be organized so as to provide the regime with a social base in the countryside. In reality there were relatively few peasants in the kombedy, which mainly consisted of members of the food detachments, military personnel, and party workers. This was hardly surprising given that they were closely associated with arbitrary confiscation of grain, fines, illegal arrests, and the use of force. This is not to say that there was no support at all for the kombedy. In Orel province peasants petitioned:

Send us help, even if it is only a small Red Army detachment, so that we shall be saved from an early death from hunger …. We will point out to you the well-fed grain kings who shelter by their treasure chests.

We are having to work in unbelievably difficult conditions. Every peasant hides grain, digging it into the earth. Our district was one of first to deliver only because we took repressive measures against those holding it back: namely, we sat peasants in cold barns until they eventually took us to the place where the grain was hidden. But for this they arrested our comrades, the commander of the squad, and three commissars. Now we are still working but less successfully. For hiding grain we confiscate the entire herd without payment, leaving only the 12-funt hunger ration, and we send those who hide their grain to detainment in Malmysh where they have only an eighth of a funt of bread per day. The peasants call us internal enemies and look upon the food officials as beasts and as their enemies.

Report of a food-supply official, Viatka, March 1920

But even as the kombedy were multiplying in autumn 1918, the party leadership was beginning to doubt the wisdom of the policy. In November the Sixth Congress of Soviets, commenting on the ‘bitter clashes between kombedy and peasant organs of power’, called for their abolition.

In January 1919 a ‘turn to the middle peasantry’ was accompanied by the institution of a quota assessment (*raszverstka*), whereby the food commissariat set a grain quota for each province on the basis of estimates of ‘surpluses’. Formally, it introduced some predictability into requisitioning, since each county and village knew its quota; but in reality the food detachments continued to operate much as before. The amount requisitioned steadily increased, so that by the third procurement of 1920–1, 237 million puds were raised in European Russia, about 23% of gross yield. This was no more than the procurement of 1916–17, yet it represented a huge burden of suffering for the peasantry, since output had almost halved in the intervening period. In March 1920 the chair of Novgorod provincial executive committee reported: ‘The province is starving. A huge number of peasants are eating moss and other rubbish.’ That the specific policies of requisitioning adopted made

the food crisis worse is incontrovertible, particularly given that the Bolsheviks did nothing until late in 1920 to try to halt the reduction in sown area. A less rigid policy – perhaps including elements of a tax in kind and greater reliance on the cooperative network – might have helped forestall the disaster that was building up. Nevertheless, even if the Bolsheviks had not taken a single pud of grain, peasants would still have had no incentive to market surpluses. Under Kolchak in Siberia, where there was no requisitioning, lack of manufactures and inflation caused peasants to reduce their sown areas. So it is unlikely that requisitioning could have been avoided. Fundamentally, the Bolsheviks had no choice but ‘to take from the hungry to give to the hungrier’, for the poor in the towns and grain-deficit provinces simply could not afford to feed themselves at free-market prices.

That said, at least half the needs of the urban population were met through the illegal and semi-legal market. Hundreds of thousands of ‘baggers’ scoured the countryside in search of food. The law prescribed draconian penalties for ‘speculation’, and ‘baggers’ ran the risk of arrest by the Cheka or by the road-block detachments, whose behaviour was described by the Soviet CEC as a ‘shocking disgrace’. Yet the battle against private trade was never consistent, since the government knew that without it townsfolk would starve. Thus even as the nationalization of trade was being proclaimed, the authorities in the two capitals allowed peasants to sell one-and-a-half puds of food per family member on the open market. At the same time, rationing was extended in line with the long-term Bolshevik aspiration to substitute planned distribution of goods for the anarchy of the market. In July 1918 the so-called class ration was introduced in Petrograd, followed by other cities, which grouped the population into four categories. It was designed to discriminate in favour of workers and to allow the *burzhui,* in Zinoviev's words, just enough bread so that they would not forget its smell. Yet shortages meant that it was frequently impossible to fulfil the rations even of those in category one. A joke went the rounds:

A religious instruction teacher asked his secondary school: ‘Our Lord fed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fishes. What is that called?’ To which one wag replied: ‘The ration system’.

Inability to meet rations fuelled pressure on groups to get themselves into a higher category. By April 1920 in Petrograd, 63% of the population was in category one and only 0.1% in the lowest category. Rationing also fed corruption: by 1920 there were 10 million more ration cards in circulation than members of the urban population.

A terrifying crisis was building up, yet the scent of victory caused the Bolsheviks by 1920 to believe that the draconian methods used to win the civil war could be turned to the construction of socialism. Trotsky

was the most enthusiastic exponent of the idea that ‘obligation and compulsion’ could be used to ‘reconstruct economic life on the basis of a single plan’. Not all Bolsheviks were enamoured of the idea of the labour army as a microcosm of socialist society, but for the best part of a year, the leadership committed itself to a vision of army and economy fused into a single, all-embracing military-economic body. During the first half of 1920 as many as 6 million people were drafted to work in cutting timber and peat. In March – with absenteeism on the railways running between 20% and 40% – Trotsky took over the Commissariat of Transport and set about imposing militarization on the workforce. This was a fortress built on shifting sand, however, since in some sectors ‘labour desertion’ ran as high as 90%. In a similar way, some now hailed the fact that black market prices were running at thousands of times their 1917 level as a sign that money was about to disappear, a sign of the arrival of communism. Lenin cautioned that ‘it is impossible to abolish money at once’, yet the effort to stabilize the currency and maintain money taxes now gave way to a plan to replace currency with ‘labour units’ and ‘energy units’. In the first half of 1920, 11 million people, including 7.6 million children, ate for free in public canteens, where food was meagre and badly cooked and conditions often filthy. Later in the year, payments for housing, heating, lighting, public transport, the postal service, medical care, theatre, and cinema were abolished, although this was motivated as much by practical concern at the relative cost of collecting payment for these services as by a desire to abolish money *per se.]*Indeed the process of ‘naturalizing’ the economy took place almost entirely independently of the will of the Bolsheviks; what was distinctive was that they now seized on this as evidence that the transition to socialism was well underway.

Over the winter of 1920–1 such euphoria was rapidly dispelled. The Volga region, which in 1919–20 had supplied almost 60% of grain procurements, was hit by drought in summer 1920. The drought grew worse in 1921 and by summer it was estimated that 35 million people in an area centred on the Volga, but including parts of southern Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and western Siberia, were in the grip of famine. Its severity was compounded by the cut-back in agricultural production, by losses of livestock and equipment due to war, by breakdown in transport and, of course, by requisitioning. As many as 6 million may have died, not only from starvation but from scurvy, dysentery, and typhus. The Commissariat of Enlightenment received grotesque reports that mothers were tying their children to separate corners of their huts for fear that they would eat each other.

In October 1921 Lenin finally conceded that War Communism had been a mistake, claiming that it had been dictated by ‘desperate necessity’ and also, rather confusingly, ‘an attempt to introduce the socialist principles of production and distribution by “direct assault”’. There can be little doubt that the collapse of industry, chaos in the transport system, and the destruction wrought by war placed severe constraints on the Bolsheviks' room for manoeuvre. Moreover, the war determined that grain procurement and industrial production be concentrated on the needs of the Red Army rather than consumers. That circumstances of war did much to dictate policy can be seen from the fact that even White regimes, committed to the free market, resorted to measures of economic compulsion in the ‘interests of state’. Moreover, policies, whether carefully crafted or hastily cobbled together, threw up entirely unintended consequences that set parameters for future action. The imposition of fixed prices on agricultural products, for example, a policy introduced by the tsarist regime, did much to stoke hyperinflation which, in turn, served to undermine the ruble. Nevertheless if structural constraints and contingencies did much to shape the policies that constituted War Communism, one may not conclude that those policies were simply the outcome of ‘desperate necessity’. Policy choices were not unilaterally ‘imposed’ by objective circumstances: they were defined by the dominant conceptions and inherited dispositions of the Bolshevik party, sometimes as matters of explicit choice, sometimes as unconscious reflexes. Antipathy towards the market, and the equation of state

ownership and state regulation with communism all served to determine the policy choices taken. Lenin may have concluded that War Communism was an error, but the command-administrative system and militarized ideology that it engendered proved to be lasting elements of the Soviet system. **Looting the looters**

The collapse of industry and the grave food shortages led to the breakdown of urban life. Between 1917 and 1920, the percentage of the population living in towns fell from 18% to 15%, but the population of Petrograd fell by almost 70% and that of Moscow by half. The desperate search for food forced people to truck and barter and to pillage furniture, wooden fences, any available tree to stay warm. The literary critic V. Shklovsky wrote: ‘People who lived in housing with central heating died in droves. They froze to death – whole apartments of them.’ It was against this background of extraordinary crisis that the centuries-old division between propertied Russia and the toiling masses was wiped out in a matter of months. Seldom has history seen so precipitate and so total a destruction of a ruling class. In its editorial to mark New Year 1919, *Pravda* proclaimed:

Where are the wealthy, the fashionable ladies, the expensive restaurants and private mansions, the beautiful entrances, the lying newspapers, all the corrupted ‘golden life’? All swept away.

The nationalization of industry and the banks constituted the principal mechanism through which the assets of the capitalists were expropriated. In the countryside, of course, the peasants turfed the landowners off their estates although not infrequently they allowed them to stay in their ancestral homes. In addition, soviets and Chekas, strapped for cash and obsessed with putting ‘all power into the hands of the localities’, exacted ‘contributions’ and ‘confiscations’ from those they considered *burzhui.]* In Tver' the soviet demanded sums ranging

from 20,000 to 100,000 rubles from local traders and industrialists, threatening to send them to Kronstadt if they did not comply. Given the weakness of the local authorities, such expropriations were often barely distinguishable from banditry, as the leading Chekist M. I. Latsis conceded:

Our Russian figures: ‘Don't I really deserve those pants and boots that the bourgeoisie have been wearing until now! That's a reward for my work, right? So, I'll take what's mine.’

Hit by ‘requisitions’, forced to share their apartments with poor families and to do humiliating work assignments, landowners, capitalists, and tsarist officials sold what they could, packed their belongings, and headed for White areas or abroad. Between 1917 and 1921, 1.8 million to 2 million emigrated, overwhelmingly from the educated and propertied groups. A surprising number, however, chose to hang on: A. A. Golovin, scion of an ancient family, worked in the garage of the Malyi Theatre in 1921 and his son went on to become famous for his film portrayals of Stalin. These ‘former people’ – a term once applied to criminals – struggled to conceal their origins and to steer clear of politics. Yet despite their severe reduction in circumstance, they continued to be viewed with mistrust by the regime, seen as the potential fifth column for a White-Guard restoration.

For the multifarious middle classes, opportunities to adapt to the new order were more plentiful, although the revolution also brought a sharp diminution in their privileges. While Lenin despised the intelligentsia, he was quick to understand that the revolution could not survive without ‘knowledgeable, experienced, businesslike people’. As well as paying engineers relatively high salaries, doctors, dentists, architects, and other professionals were allowed to practise privately. Nor was it unusual for former factory owners to sit on the industrialbranch boards of the Supreme Economic Council or for former merchants to work for the supply organs. Those with some educationfound jobs in the soviet and party apparatus – as clerks, secretaries, minor functionaries – which entitled them to the second-grade food ration (‘responsible’ soviet officials qualified for the first). For the far more numerous lower-middle strata who lacked saleable skills the principal means of survival was through petty trade and artisanal production.

The intelligentsia was the only elite group to survive the revolution intact, though its self-image was badly shaken. Most were moderate socialists in sympathy, but the war and revolution had killed any naïve belief in the innate goodness of the people. Their sense of themselves as the conscience of society, called upon to oppose tyranny, led most to oppose the Bolshevik seizure of power. They deplored the strident demagogy of the new rulers, the violence, the closure of the press, the lawlessness on the streets. Most had had enough of politics and took a neutral stance in the civil war. Most were not well paid and few had reserves to fall back on. The composer A. T. Grechaninov recalled: ‘my health was undermined to such an extent that I could hardly drag my feet. My hands suffered from frost bite and I could not touch the piano.’ Morale, however, was not necessarily as low as one might assume. N. Berdiaev, elected to a professorship of philosophy at Moscow University in 1920 – where ‘I gave lectures in which I openly and without hindrance criticized Marxism’ – did not mind labour conscription:

I did not feel at all depressed and unhappy despite the unaccustomed strain of the pick and shovel on my sedentary muscles … I could not help realizing the justice of my predicament.

The Bolsheviks came to power bent on disestablishing and dispossessing the Orthodox Church, which had been a key pillar of the old order. Church and state were separated, church lands were nationalized, state subsidies were withdrawn, religious education was outlawed in schools, and religion was made a ‘private matter’. The response of the new patriarch of the Church, Tikhon, was crushing: in

January 1918 he pronounced an anathema on the Bolsheviks, warning that they would ‘burn in hell in the life hereafter and be cursed for generations’. The ending of financial subventions hit the central and diocesan administrations hard, but made little difference to parish clergy, who were generally provided with an allotment of land and some financial support by parishioners. By late 1920, 673 monasteries – ‘powerful screws in the exploiting machine of the old ruling classes’ – had been liquidated and their land confiscated. Violent clashes between supporters of the Church and of soviet power were a constant of the civil war. Bolshevik propaganda portrayed priests as drunkards and gluttons, and monks and nuns as sinister ‘black crows’. For their part, most of hierarchy portrayed the Bolsheviks as Christ-haters, German hirelings, ‘Jewish-Masonic slave-masters’. Tikhon urged the faithful to resist the Bolsheviks only by spiritual means, but many clergy sided openly with the Whites. Bolshevik supporters, particularly sailors and soldiers, meted out horrible repression: in 1918–19, 28 bishops and several hundred clergy were killed.

The class structure of tsarist Russia buckled under the blows of war, economic collapse, and revolutionary attack. Yet having overturned Russia's somewhat fragile class structure, the Bolsheviks chose to use the discourse of class to define and organize the new social world, backing it up with the panoply of material and symbolic resources at the disposal of the state. They projected the civil war as a life-and-death struggle between international capital and the workers and toiling peasants of the world. The speeches of activists were studded with images of revolutionary conflagrations, of counter-revolutionary hydras and capitalist jackals. Though much propaganda was couched in language that ordinary folk could barely understand, the discourse played upon demotic understandings of class that had been so visible in 1917, mobilizing deep-seated animosity between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

Historians debate the extent to which the party-state came into being as the result of Bolshevik ideology or the pressures of civil war. Some argue that the seeds of Bolshevik tyranny lay in the Marxist notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat; others in Lenin's notion of the vanguard party with its implication that the party knew what was best for the working class. Such fundamental tenets certainly played a part in bringing an authoritarian party-state into being. Yet the civil war was as much about certain principles being jettisoned as about others being confirmed. The decentralized vision of socialism associated with 1917 – soviet democracy, workers' self-management – was permanently sidelined. State, party, and army – not the soviets or factory committees – now came to be seen as the bearers of revolution. The fact that ideology evolved in this way suggests that it was not the sole or even paramount driving force behind the creation of the party dictatorship. If the seeds of dictatorship lay in ideology, they only cameto fruition in the face of the remorseless demands placed on party and state by civil war and economic collapse.

The culture of the party was profoundly changed by civil war. The atmosphere of pervasive violence and destruction, the unremitting popular hostility, sharpened dictatorial and brutal reflexes. The Bolshevik ethos had always been one of ruthlessness, authoritarianism, and ‘class hatred’, but in the context of civil war these qualities transmogrified into cruelty, fanaticism, and absolute intolerance of those who thought differently. The invasion of foreign powers, the failure of revolution to spread across Europe, bred a mentality of encirclement, of Russia as an armed fortress, as well as an obsession with enemies: ‘The enemy keeps watch over us and is ready at any minute to exploit our every blunder, mistake, or gesture of vacillation.’ The fact that the Bolsheviks achieved victory in the war – albeit at a punishing cost – strengthened illusions of infallibility. It was such attitudes that increasingly came to define the party. The change in culture, though not a direct expression of ideology, was easily justified in terms of it. As M. S. Ol'minsky told the Ninth Party Conference in 1920: Old Bolsheviks understood that the sacrifice of democracy was dictated by the emergency of war; ‘but many of our comrades understand the destruction of all democracy as the last word in communism, as real communism’.

Finally, the civil war saw the hardening conviction that the state was the modality through which socialism would be built. Lenin's ideology – his absolutization of the state as an instrument of class rule – was at the root of this process. But the hypertrophy of the party-state was as much the result of improvisation in the face of crises and unforeseen developments as of wilful intention. Indeed ideology in many respects left the Bolsheviks powerless to make sense of the forces that were shaping their regime, nowhere more so than in their primitive understanding of ‘bureaucracy’. Having eliminated private ownership of the means of production with astounding ease, Lenin became

convinced that the state alone was the guarantor of progress to socialism. Proletarian power was guaranteed exclusively by the state and had nothing to do, for example, with the nature of authority relations in the workplace. Lenin thus had no inkling that the state itself could become an instrument of exploitation and little insight into how the Bolsheviks themselves could be ‘captured’ by the apparatus they notionally controlled. **NEP: politics and  
the economy**

In March 1921 Lenin told the Tenth Party Congress that Russia was like a man ‘beaten to within an inch of his life’. The Congress, in session as the Kronstadt rebellion was underway, took place against a background of utter devastation in the economy and nation-wide peasant insurgency. Many feared that the regime might not survive. The response of Congress was to endorse a policy that had been urged by some in the party for well over a year: the abandonment of forced requisitioning in favour of a tax in kind on the peasantry, calculated as a percentage of the harvest. This relatively modest step marked the inauguration of the New Economic Policy (NEP), which soon turned into a wholescale repudiation of War Communism. Following the Congress, the Soviet CEC made clear that grain surpluses might be sold to cooperatives or on the open market (the word ‘trade’ was still taboo). Rationing and state distribution of subsistence items were soon dismantled; and cooperatives and private individuals were permitted to lease small-scale enterprises. Later, in response to the so-called ‘scissors crisis’ – which saw the ‘blades’ of industrial and agricultural prices open ever wider to the point where in October 1923 the ratio of the former to the latter stood at three times the 1913 level – the government imposed stringent fiscal, credit, and price measures to cut industrial prices. This entailed slashing public expenditure and subsidies to state enterprises. By 1924 a stable currency had been established in which the ruble was backed by gold. Full NEP was now in place: a hybrid, evolving system that

combined a peasant economy, a state sector subject to ‘commercial accounting’, private trade and industry, a state and cooperative network of procurement and distribution, a credit system, and a rudimentary capital market.

In the jargon of the day, the aim of NEP was to cement the alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry. Lenin spoke of it both as a ‘retreat’ and as a policy intended to last ‘seriously and for a long time’. In his last writings, penned when he was already seriously ill, he seemed to sketch a scenario in which the transition to socialism would be a gradual one, based upon cultural revolution (see Chapter 5) and the expansion of cooperatives among the peasantry, even going so far as to concede that ‘there has been a radical modification in our whole outlook on socialism’. Historians argue over the significance of these valedictory meditations. Some see them as evidence that Lenin had come to embrace a semi-liberal, market-based alternative to statist socialism, in which the Soviet Union would evolve gradually from state capitalism to socialism. Others point out that neither he nor his party ever deviated from a conception of socialism as the elimination of the market and complete state ownership of the means of production. What is clear is that Lenin came to see NEP as more than a ‘retreat’, as a transitional system in which market mechanisms would gradually strengthen the state sector at the expense of the private sector over at least ‘one or two decades’. All leading Bolsheviks came to accept that NEP was more than a temporary retreat, but they disagreed violently about the nature and duration of this transition period.

The economic year 1925–6 marked the apogee of NEP, this being the time when official policy, as articulated by Bukharin and backed by Stalin, was at its most favourable to the peasantry, particularly to the kulaks. The leadership announced that taxes were to be lowered and subsequently restrictions on hiring labour and leasing land were relaxed. In 1923–4 the tax in kind had been commuted into an exclusively money tax levied on cultivated land, cattle, and horses. It

operated on a progressive basis: in 1924–5 one-fifth of households were exempt on the grounds that they were poor peasants and by 1929 this proportion had risen to one-third. Overall, the level of direct taxation on farm incomes increased in comparison with the pre-war period; but since land rents had been abolished, the combined burden of indirect and direct taxes fell from 19% in 1913 to just under 10% in 1926–7. By that year, grain production had recovered to its pre-war level and output of non-grain products was well above pre-war levels. Yet all was not as well as it seemed. The fundamental purpose of NEP – notwithstanding all the mollifying talk about the peasantry – was to squeeze the rural sector in order to raise the capital necessary for industrial investment. In particular, the government wished to export grain – which in fact accounted for only 35% of net agricultural produce in 1926 – in order to pay for imports of machinery. To its alarm, however, the peasants were still marketing less grain than before the war, preferring to use it to feed the growing rural population and rebuild livestock herds. The government responded by raising procurement targets and moving from procurement through the market to procurement by state and cooperative organs. After January 1928, it behaved as though grain were state property.

During the period of NEP, the underlying resilience and traditionalism of agriculture made itself powerfully felt. The land revolution had reversed the long-term decline in communal land use, the commune even spreading to new areas such as Ukraine. Agriculture remained woefully primitive, with equipment such as horse-drawn sowing machines, harvesters, mowers, and threshing machines extremely rare. The robustness of the commune was a factor inhibiting mechanization and government efforts to encourage genuine collective farms. Yet it would be an error to conclude that peasant society had sunk back into timehonoured ways. By 1928 nearly half of peasant households were members of consumer cooperatives, and agronomists and land surveyors continued the process, begun by Stolypin, of reorganizing land in a more rational and equitable fashion, mainly to the benefit of

e neediest households. Peasant attitudes to farming were not monolithic: traditional orientations prevailed, yet the burning question of land had ceased to absorb the younger generation in the way it had their parents. A sample of letters from the 1.3 million sent to the *Peasant Newspaper* between 1924–6 presents a complex picture. Nearly 60% of letters reflect a preference for collective over individual forms of enterprise but see the gradual development of cooperatives as most in tune with Russian ways; and while not antagonistic to the market, they urge the state to help agriculture through taxation and subsidies. The rest of the letters divide more or less equally into three categories: those that are mistrustful of the state and advocate individual entrepreneurship as the only way to improve peasant living standards; those – overwhelmingly from poor peasants – that bemoan continuing inequalities and look to the state to rectify these; and those – whose authors include communists and members of agrarian communes – that are genuinely enthusiastic for collective farms. All this suggests that change was taking place in agriculture. The problem was that it was too slow to sustain the rapid modernization that the regime wished to see.

**Industry and labour**

The struggle with more advanced capitalist states that had been a key element in the civil war, combined with an apocalyptic sense that socialist Russia was destined to outstrip the capitalist West, helped during the early 1920s to redefine the nature of the revolution as one against socio-economic and cultural backwardness. NEP saw the Bolsheviks discard the illusion that revolution in the advanced capitalist world would come to their aid and forced them to accept that they would have to pull themselves up by their own boot-straps. The paramount goals were to industrialize, urbanize, modernize agriculture, and bring education and prosperity to the Soviet people. These objectives were not fundamentally different from those of the late tsarist regime, and the end of the 1920s was to see a revival of the

traditional Russian pattern of state-induced transformation of society, driven by military and economic competition with the West. Yet the ideology that articulated these goals was historically new. In contrast to capitalist industrialization, socialist industrialization was to be carried out on a rational basis, by means of specialization, universal norms, and a ‘single economic plan’, about which there had been much talk since 1917. A new strain in Bolshevik ideology, which may be termed ‘productivist’, now came to the fore. This put the development of the productive forces and the planned organization of production at the heart of the socialist vision. It emphasized the role of science and technology in building socialism. Productivism was evident in Lenin's enthusiasm for electrification, which he avowed would ‘produce a decisive victory of the principles of communism in our country’ by transforming small-scale agriculture, by eliminating drudgery from the home, and by dramatically improving public health and sanitation.

NEP stimulated a rapid recovery of industry: by 1926–7, production in large-scale industry surpassed the pre-war level and the total number employed in industry (3.1 million), construction (0.2 million), and railways (0.9 million) was roughly the same as in 1913. However, NEP proved far more successful in stimulating light industry than the heavy industry that Russia so badly needed if it were to become a strong industrial power. Moreover, once existing factories had been restored to normal working, it was not clear that NEP could generate the level of capital necessary for the rapid construction of new factories, mines, and oil installations. In spite of privatization of small industry, nearly all large industry, together with the banks and wholesale trade, remained in state ownership. Indeed most workers – as many as four-fifths of Moscow's workforce – continued to be employed in the state enterprises. The latter were supposed to be self-financing, allowed to buy, sell, and enter into contracts, but in practice, they relied upon state subsidies. The Supreme Economic Council and the finance commissariat, together with the new State Planning Commission, influenced industrial investment by fixing wholesale prices, allocating

credit, regulating wages, and controlling imports, and by means of the annual state plan (‘control figures’). The result was that industrial costs and prices remained high: in 1926 they were roughly twice as high as in 1913, although subsequently there was some reduction. Net investment in industry did rise – to a level about one-fifth higher than in 1913 – but at the expense of investment in housing and transport. Moreover, it has been reckoned that two-thirds of growth was financed out of the state budget, quite inadequate for a poor country facing competition from much stronger neighbours. The record of NEP was thus contradictory. By 1928 gross national income had recovered to its pre-war level, but the gap in production per head between the Soviet Union and the advanced capitalist countries was as wide as ever.

With NEP the tight controls over labour associated with militarization were lifted, but managerial hierarchies were fully restored. The overriding task of the ‘Red Directors’ – nearly two-thirds of whom were technical and managerial specialists – was to revive production; and the secretaries of the party cell and the factory trade-union committee were expected to cooperate fully to achieve this. The unions lost their voice in policy-making, but could still contest management decisions through the rates-and-disputes commissions and the courts. The power of the foreman on the shop floor was substantially restored, and instances of foremen behaving rudely to workers, demanding bribes and sexual favours soon resurfaced. In spite of the emphasis on technical and managerial know-how, *spetsy* (technical specialists) remained suspect in the eyes of both workers and the regime. In 1927 miners in Shakhty in the Donbas rebelled against new production targets under the rallying-cry, ‘Beat the Communists and the Specialists.’ The following year the regime cynically exploited such sentiment by putting the Shakhty engineers on trial for ‘wrecking’. However, the regime gave its full backing to management efforts to raise productivity by cutting piece rates, increasing output norms, as well as in the longer term introducing greater mechanization, standardization, and specialization of production. To encourage

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|  | rationalization, time-study bureaux were set up and an army of psychophysiologists, psychotechnicians, and labour hygienists descended on the factories. Achievement fell well short of aspiration; yet by 1927 average hourly labour productivity had risen to a level 10% higher than in 1913.  Much of the rationalization drive was inspired by the ‘scientific organization of labour’, known by its Russian acronym NOT, an adaptation of F. W. Taylor's theory of ‘scientific management’. This was one of the more egregious expressions of the ‘productivist’ strain within Bolshevism that perceived the social organization of labour inherited from capitalism, with its particular productivity techniques and technologies, to be perfectly compatible with socialism. One of its chief proponents, A. K. Gastev, a former syndicalist and ‘worker-poet’, ran the Central Institute of Labour from 1920: ‘In the social sphere we must enter the epoch of precise measurement, formulae, blueprints, controlled calibration, social norms.’ Gastev's dream of a socialist society in which man and machine would merge did not go unchallenged. When he proclaimed in *Pravda* in 1928 that ‘the time has gone beyond recall when one could speak of the freedom of the worker in regard to the machine’, critics in the Komsomol (Communist Youth League) said that his understanding of the worker was indistinguishable from that of Henry Ford. In the late 1920s, the impulse to make science the arbiter of industrial relations came increasingly into conflict with a different strain in Bolshevism, the heroic, voluntarist strain that stressed revolutionary will and collective initiative as the means to overcome Russia's backwardness. As early as 1926 ‘shock brigades’ in the Ukrainian metallurgical industry and the Triangle rubber works in Leningrad set out to bust production norms, but ‘socialist competition’ and ‘storming’ did not become entrenched until the First Five-Year Plan.  In key respects workers' lives improved during the 1920s. Nowhere was this truer than with respect to the eight-hour working day. Real wages struggled to reach their pre-war level, but subsidized rents and |

transport meant that most workers were slightly better off. Women's wages rose relative to the pre-war period, partly because the Soviet Union became the first country in the world to introduce equal pay, but in 1928 their daily earnings were still only two-thirds those of men. Some 9 million trade-unionists enjoyed free medical care, maternity benefit, and disability and other pensions, although their real value remained pitifully low. By 1927 workers were eating somewhat better – consumption of meat, dairy products, and sugar had risen – although nutritional data suggest that diet had not improved since the 1890s. The number in employment rose substantially, to reach well over 10 million by 1929, but unemployment also rose, affecting women workers in particular. Initially, the rise in the number of jobless was due to demobilization of the Red Army and lay-offs provoked by a ‘regime of economy’ in industry; but later the rise was due to the resumption of peasant migration to the cities. In 1928 over a million people settled permanently in the cities, in addition to 3.9 million seasonal migrants, putting housing and rudimentary social services under extreme strain.

In the course of the 1920s work stoppages became fewer, shorter, and smaller in scope. According to official figures, strikes peaked in 1922 and 1923 but then fell steadily, dropping sharply in 1928. Given that working and living conditions remained very stressful, one might have expected the level of stoppages to have remained high, especially given the return to industry of many skilled and experienced workers. By 1929 half of all workers had started work before 1917. But the fall in strikes suggests not that workers were becoming less discontented, but that the regime was having some success in channelling their grievances through the rates-and-conflict commissions. Rising unemployment was doubtless also a factor depressing the level of stoppages. More generally, however, the fall in strikes may have been linked to a general increase in worker passivity that was of concern to the authorities. By 1925 the turn-out for elections to factory committees had fallen so low that the local party and trade-union cells were urged to ensure that the forthcoming elections were genuinely democratic. The campaign paidoff since the numbers attending election meetings rose and in some areas as many as half the members elected to factory committees were non-party. But such signs of worker independence were always worrying to local authorities who soon resumed the habit of removing ‘trouble makers’. By 1927 complaints of worker apathy were once again rife.

**The inner-party struggle**

In May 1922 Lenin suffered partial paralysis, severely undermining his capacity for work until October; in December he suffered two further strokes. Skirmishing within the party oligarchy to determine who should succeed him commenced, as the so-called triumvirate of Zinoviev, Stalin, and Kamenev emerged as the controlling group within the Politburo. In April 1922 Lenin's admiration of Stalin's skills as an administrator led to his being made the party's general secretary; before the year was out, he was expressing concern about the Stalin's behaviour. In December he wrote a testament in which he compared in somewhat begrudging terms the qualities of six members of the oligarchy. He reserved his harshest criticism for Stalin, whom he deemed rude, intolerant, and capricious, and urged that he be removed from his post as general secretary. He praised Trotsky for his outstanding abilities, yet chided him for his excessive self-assurance and preoccupation with administrative matters. Lenin's intention was that the testament should remain secret; but his secretary vouchsafed its contents to Stalin, who henceforward kept Lenin incommunicado, under the surveillance of doctors who reported to him alone. Despite his frailty, Lenin struggled to thwart Stalin's pretensions, objecting vigorously to the way he rode roughshod over the Georgian communists who dared to oppose his plan to absorb Georgia into the RSFSR. When on 4 March 1923 he learnt of an incident in which Stalin had subjected Krupskaia to a ‘storm of coarse abuse’, he fired off a furious letter threatening to break off relations with the general secretary. But his struggle against the ‘marvellous Georgian’ whom he had done so much to promote, though heroic, had come too late. On 10 March he suffered a massive stroke that left him speechless and paralysed, and in January 1924 he died.

Trotsky was by far the most charismatic of Lenin's heirs yet he was heartily detested by the triumvirate. Not least of the factors that prevented him from stepping into Lenin's shoes was what A. Lunacharsky called ‘his tremendous imperiousness and inability or unwillingness to be at all amiable and attentive to people’. Not until October 1923, against the background of the ‘scissors crisis’, did he come out in opposition to the triumvirate, lambasting the bureaucratization of the party and calling for accelerated industrialization in order to strengthen the proletariat. During 1924 Stalin and Zinoviev waged a vituperative campaign against this left opposition, impugning Trotsky's claim to be a Bolshevik by drawing attention to his conflicts with Lenin prior to 1917. Since Trotsky had been no friend to earlier opposition groups, his belated conversion to the cause of inner-party democracy was seen by many as no more than a cover for ‘bonapartist’ ambitions.

In late 1924, to counter the left's claim that international revolution was the sole means of guaranteeing Russia's survival as a socialist regime, Stalin enunciated a new doctrine of ‘socialism in one country’, thereby inaugurating a process that would end in the 1930s in the full-scale rehabilitation of Russia's history and traditions. Once Trotsky had been removed from the presidency of the Revolutionary Military Council in January 1925, Zinoviev and Kamenev turned their fire on Bukharin, the most eloquent defender of NEP. They believed that excessive concessions were now being made to the peasantry and knew that Stalin, about whose ambitions they had been concerned for a long time, stood full-square behind Bukharin. At the Fourteenth Party Congress in December 1925, they attacked the general secretary's vast concentration of power, but Stalin was by now powerful enough to have them removed from key positions. In summer 1926, in an astonishing turn of events, Zinoviev and Kamenev joined forces with their erstwhile foe, Trotsky, to form the United Opposition. Stalin, determined to annihilate this new challenge, aligned himself with a right-wing bloc of Bukharin, A. Rykov, head of the Council of People's Commissars, and  
Tomsky, the trade-union leader. In October 1926 Trotsky and Zinoviev were hounded from the Central Committee, accused of representing a ‘social democratic deviation’, and by November 1927 both had been expelled from the party. In January 1928 Trotsky was exiled to Alma Ata, a prelude to his deportation and ultimate assassination at the hands of Stalin's henchmen. As the grain procurement crisis deepened in 1927–8, however, Stalin shifted position decisively. Spurning the gradualism favoured by the right, he called in 1928 for a ‘decisive struggle’ against ‘right opportunism’. Brilliant theoretician though he was, Bukharin was no match for him politically. By April 1929 the ‘right opposition’, which barely functioned as an organized faction, was smashed and Bukharin expelled from the Politburo.

At the heart of the inner-party struggle was a conflict about the optimal strategy for industrializing Russia in conditions of economic and social backwardness and international isolation. Yet the central place of class within Bolshevik ideology meant that the debate focused less on technical questions than on whether particular policies were ‘proletarian’ or ‘bourgeois’ in their implications. Trotsky accepted the framework of NEP – the market, material incentives, and the alliance with the peasantry – but emphasized the primacy of building state industry and defending the proletariat. Bukharin, by contrast, argued that the preservation of the alliance with the peasantry was the overriding priority. Peasants should be allowed to prosper – thus his slogan ‘Enrich yourselves’, which so outraged the left – since the more efficient state sector would meet the rising demand for consumer goods, gradually squeezing out the private sector. Bukharin recognized that progress would be slow, likening his programme to ‘riding into socialism on a peasant nag’, but the United Opposition was alarmed because they believed that this would allow ‘kulak’ forces to strengthen. So long as NEP appeared to be working, Stalin pursued a middle course, successfully exploiting divisions among his opponents. In 1926 he inclined to the right rather than to the left, opposing the Dnieprostroi dam on the grounds that it was like a peasant buying a gramophonewhen he should be repairing his plough. But as the perception gained ground that NEP was running into the sand, he switched course sharply, demanding by 1928 a pace of industrialization far more hectic than anything ever contemplated by the left. Since the country was falling ever further behind the advanced capitalist powers, the Stalin faction insisted that speed was of the essence and that a decisive breakthrough could come about only by breaking with NEP.

Although one cannot interpret the inner-party conflict as a naked struggle for power, the issue of power was nevertheless at its heart. Lenin, who had ruled by virtue of his charisma rather than formal position, bequeathed a structure of weak but bloated institutions that relied for direction on a strong leader. No one in the oligarchy enjoyed anything like his personal authority. The question of who should succeed him thus raised thorny issues about the institutionalization of power. Though hardly champions of socialist democracy, the left opposition stood for collective leadership, against the extreme concentration of power in the central organs of the party, and for tolerance of a range of opinion within the party. Yet they believed in the paramount importance of discipline and unity and were terrified of being seen as splitters. This disarmed them psychologically – no more pathetic evidence for which exists than Trotsky's admission to the Thirteenth Party Congress in May 1924 that ‘the party in the last analysis is always right.’ Stalin ably traded on the widespread fear of disunity, building up a reputation as a champion of orthodoxy against assorted malcontents. By harping on Trotsky's differences with Lenin in the past, he attached himself to the growing cult of Lenin, notably with the publication in 1924 of his *Foundations of Leninism,* which set up Lenin as the touchstone of political rectitude. This became a key text in the education of the tens of thousands of new recruits who were easily persuaded that the ‘anti-Leninism’ of the opposition deprived them of the right to a fair hearing. Similarly, by nailing his colours to the mast of ‘socialism in one country’, Stalin opened up the positive perspective of backward Russia raising herself through her own efforts, without

waiting for international revolution. Trotsky, against whom the new doctrine was targeted, never in fact denied that it was possible to begin socialist construction; but he saw international revolution as necessary in the longer term if Russia were not to be forced into autarchy and diplomatic isolation. Stalin characterized Trotsky's perspective of permanent revolution as one of ‘permanent gloom’ and ‘permanent hopelessness’. He and his supporters, by contrast, presented themselves as optimistic, loyal and disciplined, ‘doers’ rather than whiners. This played to the latent nationalism in the burgeoning ranks of young party members, mostly working-class, who whilst parroting the language of class and internationalism, deeply resented the notion that Russia was inferior to the West. This ideological and psychological context helps us to understand why Stalin came out on top in the inner-party conflict; but it hardly explains how an able but relatively inconspicuous ‘organization man’ could become one of the 20th century's most savage tyrants. To appreciate this, one must look to Stalin's personality and to his brilliant grasp of machine politics. Stalin, in contrast to Lenin and Trotsky, was born into poverty, into a family where his violent and drunken father was frequently absent. This early experience bred a deeply pessimistic outlook on life; he shared completely the view of Machiavelli – whom he had read – that ‘men are ungrateful, fickle, liars and deceivers’. Outshone intellectually by the likes of Trotsky and Kamenev, he made his mark by his immense capacity for detailed work. A first-rate tactician with an excellent memory, he was cool and calculating, averse to the histrionics to which Zinoviev and Trotsky were prone. In the words of M. I. Riutin, leader of the last of the opposition groupings in the early 1930s, he was ‘narrow-minded, sly, power-loving, vengeful, treacherous, envious, hypocritical, insolent, boastful, stubborn’. What this misses is the fact that he was also genial and unstuffy, with a capacity to make himself agreeable.

From April 1922 Stalin was the only member of the oligarchy who was simultaneously a full member of the Politburo, the Orgburo, and the Secretariat. Through control of the latter two organs, he was able to influence the agenda of the Politburo and to determine the appointment of personnel down to local district party secretaries. One of his first acts as general secretary was to order the latter to report to him personally by the fifth of each month. Gradually, he used his patronage to appoint supporters to key positions in the party-state apparatus and to break up the power bases of his opponents, including Zinoviev's stronghold in Leningrad and Uglanov's rightist base in Moscow. At each of the key turning-points in the inner-party struggle, with the exception of the battle against the ‘rightist deviation’ in 1928, most lower-level party leaders swung behind Stalin. By 1929 the ‘moustachioed one’ had acquired absolute control over the party machine, turning the Secretariat into his personal chancery and revealing a positively byzantine capacity for intrigue and subterfuge.